

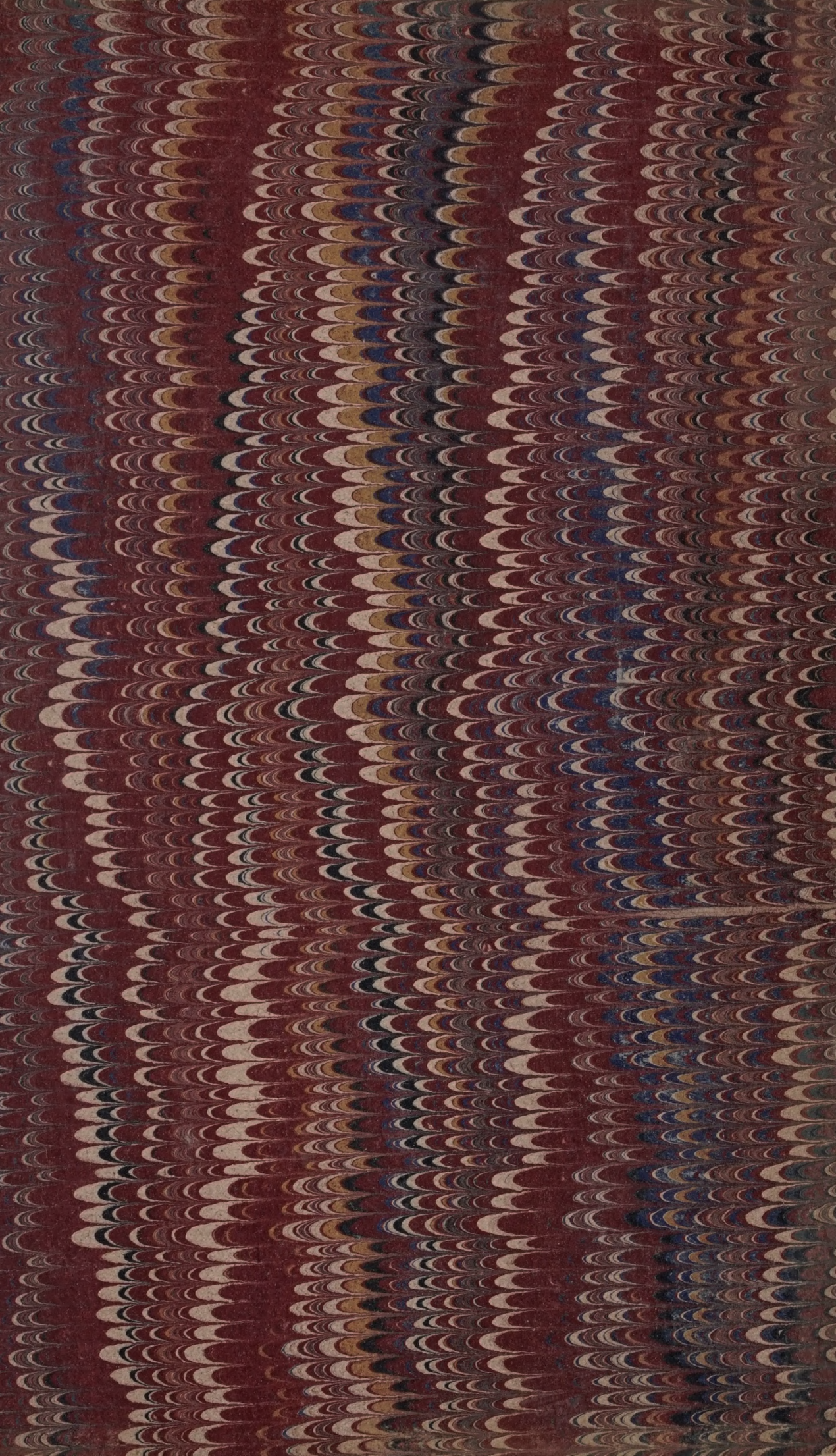


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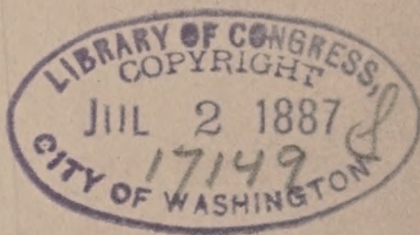
THE
HOUSE OF THE MUSICIAN

BY ✓

VIRGINIA W. JOHNSON

AUTHOR OF "THE FAINALLS OF TIPTON," "TULIP PLACE," "THE
NEPTUNE VASE," ETC.

La Vita è un Sogno



BOSTON
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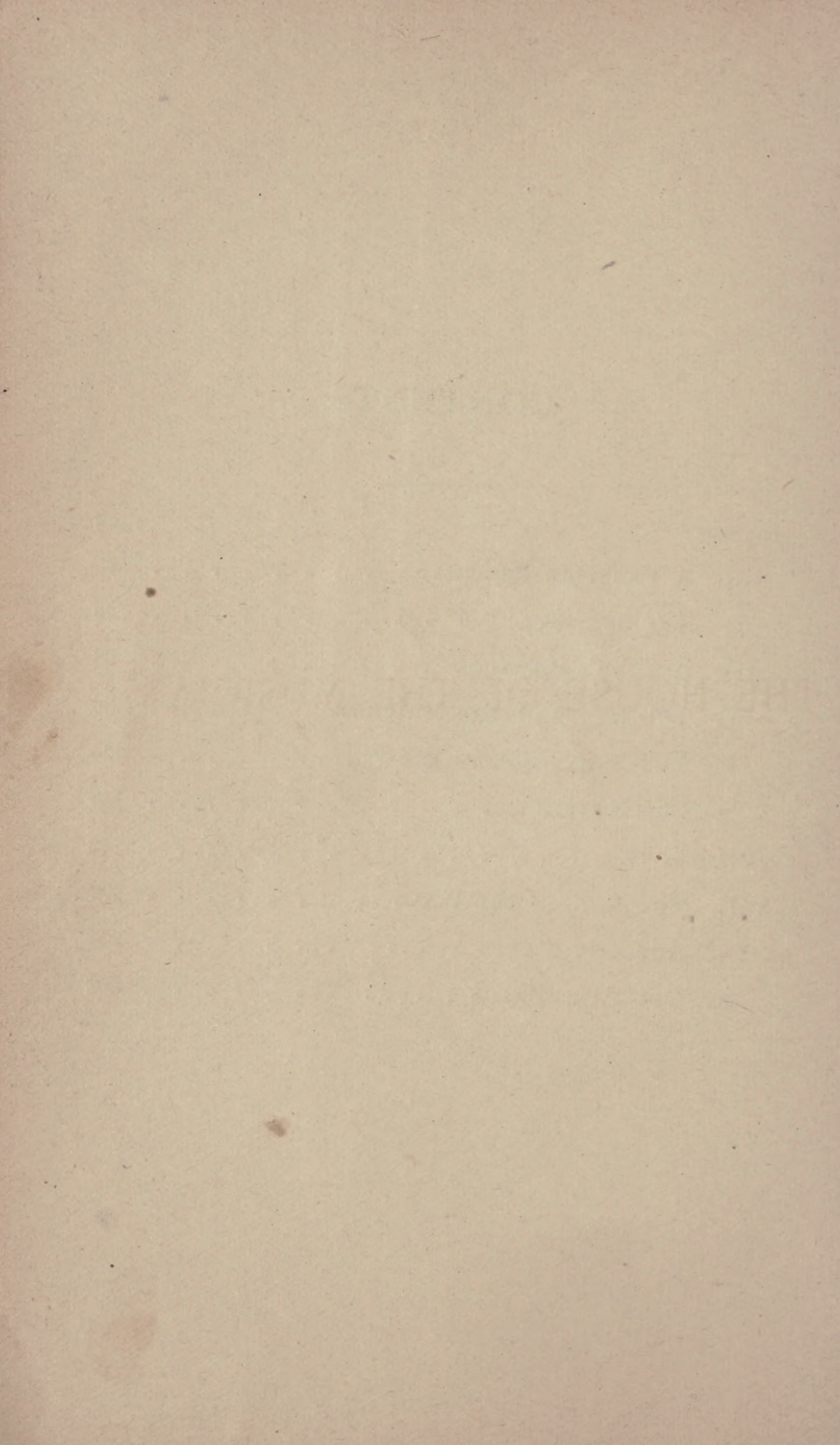
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Life, the dream, and the dream-city blend. What are both save a memory, a voice, an echo calling over the waters in the twilight.

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THE HOUSE OF THE MUSICIAN

THE HOUSE OF THE MUSICIAN.

CHAPTER I.

A VENETIAN PORTRAIT.

THE Rhine flows in a tame and sluggish current beyond Cologne, Bonn, and Düsseldorf, to a grave in the North Sea. Forgetful of a birthright amidst the glaciers and pine-forests of that majestic cradle in the Rhetian Alps, weary of a glorious prime, wending past the Loreley Berg and Drachenfels, and bearing in the murmur of lapsing waters only the echo of legend, and the tradition of the Niebelungen gold once confided to its keeping at the Rosengarten Ferry, the stream hastens to a goal, as if desirous to gain oblivion in the vast expectant ocean.

Many years ago an old man walked along the bank at a spot near Pannerden, where the Rhine divides into two branches.

The season was late in the autumn, and the withered leaves, golden and russet, still clung to the trees, or lay scattered on the path, thus enhancing the melancholy aspect of the scene. The brown hues of the earth, and the bare twigs of the shrubbery along the ridges, met the horizon line of a uniform gray mist.

The man and the river possessed a certain resemblance. Both had passed their prime, and approached the end of their course; but while the Rhine was loyally German, the wayfarer was a cosmopolitan, owning neither home nor kindred.

Elias Heins was one of those eccentric beings occasionally to be met in European centres, devoted to the study of ruins, ancient languages, and manuscripts. Profoundly erudite, he imparted knowledge only fitfully, and more frequently hoarded in silence the vast store of his own acquirements.

Living, he was at home in every country, and turned from deciphering some Runic inscription in Scandinavia, to seek a Greek sentence at Rome, indifferent to the hunger or fatigue of the journey. Dead, he would leave a few papers with which to puzzle scholars;

and his memory would as inevitably perish as his body crumble to dust.

France estimated him with a half-cynical respect ; Germany reasoned with him in somewhat ponderous debate ; England would have admitted him to the archives of the British Museum with less reluctance, had his raiment been less shabby and greasy ; and Italy accepted him, with a shrug of the shoulders, as a harmless madman, — one of those strangers who emerge from Northern lands, according to the Neapolitan code, where snow always prevails, the houses are built of wood, ignorance is great, while money is sufficiently abundant.

Seen on the Rhine bank at this hour, with his stooping figure, gray hair and beard flowing over breast and shoulders, sharp nose, and piercing eyes gazing forth from beneath shaggy brows, the imagination had free scope to invest him with characteristics in harmony with the spot. He might have been in league with Manasseh Ben Israel and Ephraim Bonus in cabalistic studies, or the ghostly phantom of one of those wizards evoked by the bishops of Stolzenfels in the practice of the unholy rites of alchemy.

In reality he had landed from a passing steamer to investigate a spot some leagues inland, where he had once found a Roman coin in the upturned soil.

He grasped his stout staff more firmly, drew his threadbare brown coat closely about his sparse form, and pressed his shabby hat more firmly over his brow.

He was intent on reaching the next hamlet before night fell. The rudest shelter sufficed for his modest requirements as a traveller; some bundles of straw for a couch, the felt hat for a pillow, and Rembrandt's dinner of a herring with bread and cheese, amply satisfied Elias Heins.

The early twilight was coming on, and the sky, obscured by those cloud masses Ruysdael loved to paint, acquired a greenish tinge in the direction of the sea. The silence was unbroken save for the ripple of the river against the shores, which had the cadence of regretful memories in the waning hour of day.

The fantastic form of the old man seemed to pursue an erratic course. Now he paused to poke a pebble or some other trifling object with his stick, and again he hastened onward

with a rapid striding step which evinced the energy of a muscular and still vigorous frame.

At length the solitary pedestrian beheld before him a scene that inspired a sentiment of satisfaction in his breast.

A mill, with an adjacent farmhouse, became visible at the bend of the road, as if conjured up to meet his need as a belated wanderer. The house was a square and heavy building, with dormer windows and a roof overgrown with rank herbage. The mill rose black against the sky, and the arms, with the ochre-tinted sail still attached, revolved, aided by a favorable breeze. A bridge connected the two structures with the highway; and, at the moment, some after-glow of the hidden sun imparted a yellow gleam to the tranquil surface of the intervening canal, where roof and tower found a sombre and distorted reflection. A stork's nest crowned the chimney, with a perch and supports added as a welcome from the household.

Near the bridge a boy was stretched on the ground, with his head resting on his left hand and elbow, while with the right he drew a design on a fragment of coarse and crumpled

paper. Unconscious of the approach of Elias Heins, he was gazing at the revolving wheel which had always possessed the charm of irresistible power and mystery to his childish fancy. The brass pendulum of the Dutch clock within doors had attracted his baby eyes, only to be speedily eclipsed by the wide sweeping wonder of the windmill without, forever turning unless checked by the miller's hand. Grace of form in the outline of tower and wheel appealed to an artistic perception inherent in the boy's nature; while the whirling aloft of arm and sail, in obedience to the whispered command of the wind, awoke unutterable, inarticulate longings in his soul. The wind was wild, boisterous, mighty in wrath, free to sweep in from the sea, or to roam over the mountains. The mill was one of the toys set in the path of Boreas. The boy realized as much without being able to frame the thought.

Even now, with the light fading, he could laugh shrilly amidst his reveries, mindful of the day when the house-mother had been left alone in this solitary spot as a bride, and a robber came demanding the store of gold in

the miller's strong-box with curses and threats calculated to daunt the most courageous heart. The bride sought refuge in the house, and refused all until she beheld the marauder creep through an aperture in the masonry communicating with the mill and machinery; when, inspired with the strength of desperation, she set the gear in motion. The arms of the engine turned, the wheel revolved on its axle, the minor mechanism began to palpitate, and the thief caught in the drum was forced to rotate like a rat in a trap, until he fell senseless, and the miller returned to capture and deliver him to justice.

Elias Heins crossed the bridge, paused beside the lad, and peered over his shoulder at the sketch already defined on the leaf of paper. The drawing was a reproduction of the familiar scene before the artist; naïve, crude, full of faults, yet with a certain latent power perceptible in the freedom of touch.

“Ho, ho! So you have made a picture of the mill, child!” remarked the intruder abruptly.

The boy glanced up at the stranger, sprang to his feet, grew red with shyness or alarm, and replied, —

“I have made it a dozen times before.”

He spoke defiantly. On more than one occasion the indignant miller had beaten him with a cudgel for loitering over a bit of paper instead of performing some allotted task about the farm and mill. In the main a just man, the miller was moved to wrath by the idleness of the boy. Or was he glad of fitting excuse to his own conscience for such disapproval? The dog we wish to drown in this world we would fain pronounce mad.

“That is well,” said Elias Heins in his deep voice. “Persevere, and you may become an artist. Who knows?”

The old man and the boy looked at each other; the former with benevolence, and the latter with distrust.

The boy, tall, slender, and fair, with yellow hair falling over his brow, and blue eyes, abstracted in expression rather than sulky and indifferent, might have stood as the representative of the early German tribes roaming along the river-bank before the day of Roman conquest. He made no other response to the prophecy of Elias Heins than to lead the way in the direction of the mill.

The miller stood in the door. He was a stout man of middle age, wearing a brown woollen shirt, a small cap, and smoking a long pipe with a porcelain bowl.

He nodded a curt acquiescence to the pedestrian's petition to be allowed to spend the night beneath his roof. It was contrary to the miller's custom to thus lodge any wayfarer the highway or river might bring to his door, but a swift scrutiny of the person and features of Elias Heins prompted the decision.

The cosmopolitan lost no time in ingratiating himself with the domestic circle, consisting of the placid wife and rosy children. He readily recalled having known the miller's grandfather on this very spot, and mentioned the circumstance with the calmness of age which readily bridges the lapse of years in a fashion startling to maturity and awe-inspiring to childhood. The memory of Elias Heins comprised seventy years without effort, the true secret of his untiring energy being the active mind and strong will enclosed in the withered frame. "He must be terribly old," the children thought, "this man with the pointed nose and long beard."

When supper was served, the intruder noticed that the boy who had first greeted him was older by several years than the rest of the brood, and ate his rye-bread in silence. If the miller had occasion to address him, the good man's tone acquired an inflection of severity.

"What is thy name?" demanded Elias Heins, inspired by curiosity.

"Gerard Grootz," stammered the lad.

The miller laughed. The wife interposed hurriedly. "Yes; Gerard Grootz," she asseverated, with a glance at her husband which was at once reproachful and deprecating.

"He has a pretty knack of using his pencil, your eldest son," continued Elias Heins. "Perhaps you would rather see him prepared to succeed you in the mill than turn painter. Eh, my friend?"

"He will never succeed me," retorted the miller in a surly tone, and once more filling his pipe after the evening repast was finished.

The children tittered and whispered together. The keen ear of the old man caught the taunt, "Gerard is a stork child."

"So was I," retorted Elias Heins, making a

droll grimace, and winking one eye. “Eh! The stork-father brought me, one stormy night, in a little bundle, and placed me on the threshold of the mansion of a worthy citizen of Strasbourg. The good wife took me in, warmed me at the fire, and gave me some milk. The stork-father stood on the roof, and clapped his beak, well satisfied with the result. There is a bird well aware of what he is about.”

The children ceased to ply the spoons in their soup-bowls, and gazed at the stranger with round eyes, thirsting to hear more. The juvenile instinct taught them that here was a prince of story-tellers, if minded to impart one. The boy Gerard did not appear to listen, but scanned the striking physiognomy before him with half-lowered eyelids.

The house-mother again interposed; and as she pressed the old man to partake of eggs served with the pickled onions, prawns, and cucumbers of the stone jars of the cupboard, they lingered at table, and imparted the particulars of the boy Gerard's simple history.

Luise Grootz was a native of the province of Utrecht, while her husband, Johannes

Grootz, was a German. She had brought to the mill a considerable dowry, and an ample store of linen; and the interior of the farmhouse kitchen sufficiently attested her nationality. A Holland clock from Noord stood in one corner; an oak armoire, richly carved, held some good specimens of Delft ware; and little blue tiles adorned the walls, which were freshly whitewashed above. The candlesticks on the chimney-piece, as well as the pans and kettles of brass and copper, were scoured to the polished lustre of gold. The adjacent dairy, with the sanded floor, possessed the fragrance of a spotless cleanliness, while the flowered counterpanes of the household betrayed the Batavian instinct which would fain have retained the curious drawer-bed inserted in the wall of the Low Countries, shielded by curtains.

No children had blessed the union of this prosperous couple during the early years of marriage. In the springtime, when the storks began to arrive from the south, Luise Grootz found a baby at her door. She took the waif to her heart, where the maternal instinct was awakened, and as a solace for the loneliness

which began to oppress her. No clew to the boy's parentage was ever discovered; and the fanciful solution that the storks had brought him as a gift of Heaven, became readily attached to his origin.

The miller, always displeased by the intrusion of this foundling on his charity and domestic circle, became still more harsh when his own first-born saw the light some five years later.

Elias Heins, student of human nature, could readily supplement the remaining details of the history, — the unwelcome stranger-bird in the nest, the flagging impulse of Luise Grootz to defend the place of the waif long after her affections were concentrated on her own brood, the ever-increasing hostility of the rightful fledglings in an instinctive jealousy of the intruder, inherited from the father.

The *Haus-Frau* talked with the old man, as she cleared away the dishes after supper; and he listened attentively, nodding his head from time to time.

The boy Gerard, object of this unusual amount of interest and even speculation, had withdrawn to a corner, where he knelt behind

a bench, and, from scrutinizing intently the new-comer, became absorbed in a task of profound interest to himself. The other children discovered his employment, laughed, and glanced furtively at Elias Heins. The miller, coming and going, pipe in mouth, relaxed into a smile of amusement.

Elias Heins quitted his chair, and approached the group.

The boy, with the fragment of coarse paper on which he had sketched the mill, reversed, and using the bench for a table, was now boldly drawing a head.

Elias Heins recognized himself. Possibly he may have experienced that sentiment of surprise and chagrin which we all feel at times, in the result of the photographer's skill as embodying justice without mercy; for the boy had discerned and pitilessly reproduced the furrows of temple and brow, the sharply accentuated lines at the angles of the nostrils, the depression of jaw and chin, as well as the shaggy locks of unkempt hair, and abundant beard. The *savant* beheld in that mirror of truth, the coarse sheet on the bench, decrepitude, poverty, loneliness, and even grim death.

“Ha! My portrait,” he muttered, recoiling a pace.

The children tittered, and ran away. The boy Gerard shook back his yellow hair, and looked up fearlessly, with sparkling eyes, and a flush on his cheek.

“No! No, good sir,” he exclaimed in a loud and clear voice. “This is not your portrait, but with a larger piece of paper I could do it. You understand? If I had time.”

Elias Heins remained absorbed in meditation. He recognized that a spirit-birth had just taken place in the kitchen of the farmhouse, a flower had burst the calyx, a winged seed had become detached from the parent stem of circumstance. What would the growth develop? He did not know. Whither would the gossamer sail of talent and fancy carry the germ? He could not discern. All he realized was that the young intelligence of an artist had taken the first step in depicting the lineaments of age.

The next morning, when about to depart, he said, —

“Listen! I will take the boy to Amster-

dam, and he shall become an artist. — What do you say, my child?”

Gerard ran to him, and grasped his coat with an eager hand. The spontaneous movement of confidence gratified the old man, accustomed as he was to the cynicism and suspicions of the world.

“Yes! Oh, take me with you,” entreated the boy.

The miller yielded a grudging assent, after some debate. This sudden change of affairs puzzled and perplexed him. The mother sighed as she collected the boy's wardrobe into a modest bundle, to be suspended over a stout stick, for the journey. Ingratitude was the serpent's tooth gnawing at her maternal vanity.

“Thou art only too much rejoiced to quit us,” she said, amazed and wounded by Gerard's impatience to be gone.

He threw his arms around her neck, and embraced her. The miller's features hardened once more to their habitual expression of stolidity, at this final demonstration of mutual affection on the part of his wife and the foundling.

"Now give me the portrait," insisted Elias Heins.

"What will you do with it?" demanded the miller doubtfully.

"This morsel of paper shall serve as Gerard's passport to great company, my friend," retorted the old man, placing the paper in a large pocket-book of greasy red leather.

"Kiss thy brothers and sisters, Gerard," admonished Luise Grootz, with tears in her eyes; for the waif was about to depart forgetful of the ceremony.

A soft fog of early morning brooded over all nature. At a few paces of distance the mill and the homestead alone loomed through the mist; then the black tower remained detached on vapor; and farther on, at the bend of path, the empty stork's nest, ragged and dishevelled, was visible on the chimney, as if poised in the air above swathing clouds, and all familiar landmarks vanished.

This autumn fog was emblematic of the boy's life: infancy had been left behind, a blank void, while the future was equally undecided and undefined.

Elias Heins showed himself to be an eccen-

tric companion. Now he told Gerard about the Antwerp giant, *le bon père Antigon* of public festivals; and again he lapsed into moods of abstraction. A boy less self-absorbed or phlegmatic might have feared he was insane. Gerard scarcely heeded whether his odd benefactor spoke or remained silent.

At the outset Elias Heins had taken the lad by the hand, glanced over his shoulder at the stork's nest, and laughed in an eerie fashion.

"We are both stork-children," he said. "Stork-children do not often resemble the rest of the world. Do you understand that, boy?"

"Yes," replied Gerard slowly.

The mists stretched ever before the travellers, whether they journeyed on shore or by boat, affording glimpses of passing objects, fantastic, strange, and unreal as the shapes of dreams; the low, hanging skies and level landscapes forming the fitting background, serious and monotonous in tone, for a flitting sail; the steeples and crowding roofs of a town merging into sight only to be swallowed up in white cloud again; a vision of windmills whirling above a dyke; the Chinese pavilion of some

suburban residence, where the ladies work, sip coffee and tea, and the merchant smokes his pipe, on summer evenings, on the brink of a placid canal.

At length the boy's astonishment culminated when the sun pierced the silvery veil in a transient magnificence of light and warmth, and he saw, beyond the meadows and rich farms, the fog gather to a semblance of dome, masts, and gables. There rose the Dutch Venice, Amsterdam, beneath a sky of pearly gray and blue tints; and across the water floated the muffled note of a bell.

Elias Heins landed with his *protégé*, and made his way to one of the dark and narrow streets near the synagogues, where he selected a modest lodging.

Gerard did not sleep that night. His pulses throbbed with feverish rapidity, and the blood surged from his heart to his brain.

He beheld again the quays, the shipping, the drawbridges of the town, with the high pitched roofs, church towers, the cupola of the royal palace, the bastions, and the shining Amstel, while faces of a bewildering variety of types clustered about his pillow. He heard

a confused medley of voices, the cries of weather-beaten sailors and laborers of the port, mingled with the laughter of peasant-girls, wearing straw hats and coral beads, who brought milk from the country; the call of venders; the word of command uttered by the captain of one of those water diligences, the *Treychuit*, standing on the deck as the craft, skirting the flowers of many a bank between lush meadows where the cattle feed, paused amidst the steamers and ships, prepared to voyage to distant latitudes.

A low, monotonous sound, underlying these more sharply emphasized phases of city life, resolved into the humming of the mill-wheel at home; and Gerard was finally soothed to uneasy slumber by the familiar cradle-song of his infancy.

The next morning Elias Heins went out, leaving his charge seated at a window.

Familiar with Amsterdam, the old man met a diamond-merchant, who wished to show him a rare Brazilian stone on which his best workman had been engaged for four months, with an ardor amounting to true passion, in perfecting the gem. Elias Heins took the limpid

star, twinkling with rainbow reflections, in his own palm, gazed long at it, and hazarded a conjecture as to the value of the brilliant: "Three thousand florins."

"Five thousand," affirmed the merchant.

Elias Heins passed on with a shrug of the shoulders. Next he had a long interview with the director of a museum; and when he finally extricated himself from the crowd of the Bourse, to return to his lodging, hours had already elapsed. He had forgotten the fellow stork-child taken under his protection. Had Gerard been a half-effaced manuscript, a medallion, a weapon of the lacustrine races, a specimen of copper or iron ore, he would have had a better chance of remembrance with his new friend.

The boy made no complaint; he sat at the small casement of the chamber, like one entranced. All the pictures which would have fed a childhood keenly perceptive of beauty, grace, and ugliness, in mere book outline, were crowded into this single morning at a window of Amsterdam.

Below, the crowd came and went through the low doorways, and surged along the

streets, which extended narrow, crooked, and black in all directions. The houses leaned forward, as if in support of each other, on their foundations of piles from the forests of Norway; and seemed to verify the assertion of Erasmus, that the inhabitants dwell like crows in the tree-tops. Heads were visible at the windows, full of originality and vitality. Here an old woman adjusted a line of rags to dry, with a shrill clamor at a neighbor; there a girl with an Oriental profile, and black hair gathered in a classical knot low on the neck, toyed with a flower.

Above, the quaint gables, towers, and roofs rose against the misty sky, with the tall chimneys of the diamond-cutter craft.

Beyond the labyrinth of by-ways, a canal flowed along with several sails unfurled, red and brown.

No, the boy Gerard was not lonely, with all these novel objects on which to feed eye and imagination.

Elias Heins started when his glance fell on the silent figure.

“What age have you?” he demanded suddenly.

“Fifteen years,” replied Gerard.

“*Diable !* as old as that !” muttered the old man. He paced the room several times, paused, smoothed his beard meditatively, stared at the boy a moment, and then said briefly, —

“Come with me.”

Gerard obeyed, and they sought a large mansion on the Kalverstrasse. The stately and massive proportions of the house, with its pilasters, arcades, wide casements terminating in an arch above, and vestibule filled with flowering shrubs, bore evidence of the worldly prosperity of the owner.

“Tell Meinheer Van Limburg that Elias Heins wishes to see him,” was the peremptory announcement of the old man in his ragged coat, leading a boy of unmistakably rustic aspect by the hand.

The servant admitted the strange pair after a short delay.

The interior of the house was even more sumptuous than the exterior seemed to warrant: yet Elias Heins followed the servant through court and corridor paved with tessellated tiles, and lustrous with polished woods,

in no wise abashed by his own contrasting poverty. Nor did he vouchsafe a glance in passing the richly wrought balustrade of a stairway; the hangings of Indian stuffs revealing chambers hung with Cordova leather, and furnished with ebony cabinets, jars, and vases; the embrasures in which hyacinths blossomed.

Meinheer Van Limburg was a self-made man, and a ship-owner, whose portrait might have been painted like that of the worthy citizen Osterlen, as pointing complacently to ninety-two vessels as his own property. Jacob Van Limburg could not boast that he had inherited the tapestries, jewels, satins, and musical instruments of his house, from a Spanish ancestry, any more than the silver plate, the antique glass in heavy decanter and long-stemmed vases, and the specimens of Friesland goldsmith work, from a Dutch origin. Nevertheless, it might be said of him, as of his country, that Norway was his forest, the banks of the Rhine and the Garonne his vineyard, Pomerania and Prussia his cornfields, the Orient his garden. He also, in the Spanish estimation, was "a spider of the seas,"

bringing from Persia pearls, turquoises, silver tissues, Caramanian wool ; from China, enamels and porcelain ; from the kingdom of Pegu, gold, lac, rubies, and sapphires ; from the Coromandel coast, elephants' tusks, tin, lead, and precious woods ; from Arabia, gums, cassia, myrrh, aloes ; while the arctic seas yielded him their harvest of whale-oil ; the Cape of Good Hope, wheat ; and Dutch Guiana, cocoa, sugar, bananas, and tamarinds.

Twenty years of absence in Java in his youth had not rendered him less loyal to the mother country. He still retained his place in the counting-room, and managed his own affairs with prudence and sagacity. In public life he had aided munificently in the great work of cutting through the North Holland Canal, and he disapproved of rival Rotterdam. He read aloud the poems of Jacob Cats on a winter evening, in his family circle, with unimpaired relish of appreciation. His collection of Japanese porcelain, comprising some two thousand specimens, was unrivalled in grace of design and originality, while adhering to the national standard of taste in the blue tints of coloring.

The merchant received Elias Heins with a certain good-humored whimsicality of manner. Either by chance or premeditation, he resembled the old Holland type. Clad in dark raiment, his face was heavy and highly colored, and he smoked a pipe with a long, slender stem.

The room he occupied was sombre in hue, having furniture of massive oak studded with gilt nails, and a projecting chimney of mediæval design representing in sculptured relief the Holy Scriptures as a woman seated in a car, surrounded by the Four Evangelists on foot, with Justice on the right holding scales and sword, supported by Minerva, and Neptune on the left.

“So you return once more, friend Elias Heins,” was the greeting of the rich man. “Do you come from Egypt, or Lapland, this time?”

Elias Heins laughed waggishly.

“Why not from Patagonia?” he retorted.

“What have you brought me?” continued the merchant. “The Vatican Virgil, for example? Well, I will take it on your own terms, miser.”

Elias Heins glanced enviously in the direction of a well-stored library, where he was aware that the host treasured even a work by a Japanese author, written in the Dutch language of two centuries ago.

“I have brought you this boy,” he said, after a pause.

Meinheer Van Limburg scrutinized Gerard, who stood before him, abashed and bewildered by the splendor of this abode, and believed himself to be the dupe of some enchantment.

“The boy possesses talent, then?” queried the host, slightly compressing his lips.

“Why, as to that, I believe if you lead a horse to the fountain, and he thirsts, he will drink,” retorted the old man, with a sly expression. “There, boy, go and amuse yourself among the pictures while we talk together about matters that do not interest one of your age.”

He placed a hand on Gerard’s shoulder, and pushed him into the next apartment; but, instead of returning to his former position, drew together the damask hangings, and motioned to the merchant to join him in observing the movements of the novice thus unexpectedly

introduced into a shrine of art. At the same moment he took the folded sheet of paper from his pocket-book, and displayed the rough sketch of his own features.

Meinheer Van Limburg would have been displeased by similar familiarity of bearing in one less eccentric and inconsequent than his odd visitor; but he now consented to peep through the screen of draperies, and watch the boy.

Gerard found himself in a long and lofty picture-gallery. A Stadholder of Holland looked down upon him with grave severity of contemplation. Prince Maurice, with a silk scarf crossed over his corslet of mail, rested his right hand on the hilt of his sword. Johan van Oldenbarneveld laid his white head on the block of the scaffold, proclaiming his innocence of the charge of treason.

On either side of the door a picture arrested the attention of a new-comer, as emblematic of the struggle for existence in the country.

On the right, in the March weather, the Rhine, bursting the ice-barrier of winter with terrible power, had overflowed the land; and a solitary boat, filled with terrified women and

children, floated above the submerged houses and trees. A ray of sunshine trembled athwart the masses of rock and ice, and a flock of ducks enhanced the melancholy desolation of the scene.

On the left, in the March weather, lashed by the west wind, the furious waves surged up on the shore between Ostend and Haarlem, devouring the sand-banks, and destroying even the tawny vegetation of the dunes, the hardy broom, thyme, and heath.

Gerard studied these two works with frowning attention. Their meaning, fruit of a vigorous brush, was clear to his perception. The sweet and the salt waters, in perpetual war, disputed possession of the Low Countries. The Rhine, in ebbing, would enrich by the deposit of fresh soil, while the mission of the bitter sea was to devastate and annihilate.

Beyond, twin ranks of national subjects, treated by national artists, charmed the eye. The merchant had gathered to adorn his home valuable works of Rubens, Vandyck, Wouvermans, Paul Potter, Holbein, Cranach, Hobbema, Ostade, and Mieris, as well as Jan Steen and Teniers.

Here a spirited naval engagement attracted him, such as the destruction of the Spanish fleet in the Zuyder-Zee by the Admiral Cornelis Dirkszoon ; there the maidens of Edam, traversing the inundated meadows to carry fresh water to their cows, in a boat, caught a siren clad in green moss and shells, in a fisherman's net. Again, some tranquil landscape of a silent town, with towers and steeples and an ancient castle ruin, seen in an atmosphere of pearly-gray sea and sky, soft as the sheen of a satin robe, found contrast in an adjacent night view, with storm-birds driven before the tempest, and the ruddy beam of a light-house casting a gleam of hope over the seething brine below.

The Rubens, an allegory of war, glowed with all the richness of the master's hand in breadth of design and solid coloring. Opposite, a work by Ferdinand Bol evinced creditable emulation in the harmonious management of light, and lost little by such crucial propinquity to true greatness.

The boy advanced slowly, step by step, lost in amazement, doubt, and delight. The objects about him were so novel, incredible, and

beautiful, that he believed himself dreaming rather than awake, or to have passed into another state of being by some swift and inexplicable transition.

The gallery terminated in an alcove lighted by a glass dome above.

This alcove held one picture, which was draped with Gobelin tapestry of the seventeenth century adorned with mythological scenes of nymphs and goddesses. A Venetian chandelier, wreathed with garlands of pale crystal flowers of amber and opalescent tints, like the ephemeral sparkle of sea-foam on pearly shells, hung in the centre.

When Gerard beheld this chandelier, so fragile and exquisite that it seemed fashioned of ice and hoar-frost, and about to melt and vanish in a warm breath, he paused spell-bound.

Then his gaze fell on the canvas.

A man stood in the foreground of the picture, enveloped in a velvet robe bordered with fur, having on his head a curiously shaped cap, and holding in his fingers a string of great amber beads. In the background, beyond the marble arch of palace vestibule, were

visible the domes, towers, and canals of a city, faintly outlined in the soft gray mists of pervading atmosphere.

The man, in the prime of a splendid vitality, with olive-tinted skin, lustrous hair escaping from the cap, nose like an eagle's beak, and mobile, passionate lips, turned his stately head on the full column of bronzed throat, as if to fix a piercing glance on the visitor.

To Gerard the figure moved, thrilled, seemed to speak; and then a white cloud swept before him, and he knew no more.

The two spectators hastened forward.

"The boy has a true soul of an artist," Meinheer Van Limburg conceded, as Elias Heins raised the head of Gerard on his knee on the spot where he had fallen.

"Humph! he has taken little food to-day," was his sententious response.

"He shall have both food and wine," said the kind host.

Elias Heins glanced at the picture beneath his shaggy brows.

"What have you there?" he demanded.

"A Venetian portrait."

CHAPTER II.

THE SEA CITY.

FIVE years later, a young stranger reached Venice.

This youth was Gerard Grootz, the stork-child of the mill on the Rhine, picked up by an eccentric *savant*.

Many a destiny is shaped by standing in the path of opportunity.

Autumn, warm, rich, and luxuriant, had visited the land. The vintage had ripened for the plucking, while the heart of man rejoiced over the promised abundance of the year; when a fortnight of *scirrocco* sweeping in from the Adriatic brought such torrents of rain that the rivers Adige and Brenta surged in volumes of tawny-brown water, bursting their banks, and had flooded the vineyards and maize-fields, spreading a wide desolation. The entire Veneto was overwhelmed by the disaster. Pinching hunger confronted the

people in the devastated districts ; fever and cold threatened the damp, half-submerged dwellings, with their naked hearthstone.

The sun shone forth once more between heavy masses of cloud, after the storm, as if laughing at the ruin of farm and field ; and the hedgerows were full of flowers, — roses pale pink and deep crimson, purple altelle, and convolvulus.

Here a shattered straw hut, built on the embankment above the margin of rushes and willows, marked the shelter of a watchman set to patrol the rising stream day and night. There a van had been drawn up by the roadside, and a man with bare feet was treading out the red juice of some rescued grapes in a vat, while the oxen quietly chewed the cud.

Farther on, the piers and buttresses of a sunken bridge rose in the eddying current, and boats crossed the river, freighted with golden sheaves of Indian corn, to a spot where the grain was piled ; sorry gleaning of the sultry summer's promised abundance.

On the Austrian frontier, a brown peasant-girl thrust a bunch of grapes into the window of the railway-carriage, with a coaxing en-

treaty to buy the fruit. Gerard Grootz had received the fragrant cluster of amber globes, garnering Italian sunshine, with crumpled and withered leaves attached to the stem, as a welcome from the land beyond the Alpine gateway.

He had come to Italy as Rubens, Vandyck, and Albert Dürer once journeyed hither. Unlike the former, he was furnished with no introduction to Duke Vincenzo Gonzaga of Mantua, wherewith to gain additional fame, and make collections of medals, coins, and intaglios for the sumptuous Antwerp house erected on the ground granted by the guild of arquebusiers. He was poor and unknown; perhaps he lacked the gifts of these renowned predecessors.

The train crept slowly along a recently mended track, affording glimpses of green country, acacias, and chestnut woods stretching away to the mountain peaks. Ancient towns, perched on spur and ridge above the general ruin, came into sight, and were again left behind, their towers soaring up from church, piazza, and arched gateway. Below, the opaque waters coiled in sluggish pools,

or spread over the entire country-side, with crumbling homesteads toppling into the tide in hopeless abandonment of wreck. Then there was wafted in the window a salt breath of breeze, which stirred the hair on the brow of the young artist; and he discerned, in the distance, a haze with a faint shimmer of dome and tower, gleaming through the silvery vapor, as in the portrait of the Van Limburg gallery. The breeze came, fresh and pure, from the sea; the city was Venice on her gray lagoons.

Gerard Grootz quitted the prosaic station, and sought a modest inn, the Mezza-Luna, situated in the eastern portion of the town.

An old man waited at the steps to bring the gondola to shore by means of his hook.

He doffed his wide felt hat to receive the customary fee; and the wind played with the picturesque rags in which he was enveloped, revealing a chain and a charm suspended about his neck, while the sunshine sparkled on the instrument of his calling, — the *ganzo*, — with handle decked profusely with bits of mosaic, a cameo, several coins of the Republic, a medal of Pius IX., and one of the silver *osele* of the Venetian Doges.

Gerard bestowed an alms on the patriarch, whose fine head pleased his eye. Indeed, he experienced the *naïve* surprise felt by every traveller, under similar circumstances, who believes he tastes a novel emotion for the first time in the world. The attendant gondola had glided gently with him along the Grand Canal, and he had realized:—

“There is a glorious city in the sea ;
The sea is in the broad, the narrow streets,
Ebbing and flowing, and the salt seaweed
Clings to the marble of her palaces.”

Near the hooker, or crab, stood a dwarf, with a large head, a whimsical physiognomy, and a pair of sharp black eyes which inspected the stranger keenly, as their owner humbly begged for a few coppers, thus echoing the old man's whining petition.

Gerard, depositing his slender stock of luggage in the chamber assigned to him, was served with a frugal breakfast in a vine-covered *pergola* of the neglected garden.

A party of *gondolieri* were feasting at an adjacent table, in celebration of a baptism ; and the landlord of the Mezza-Luna ministered

his best wines to these noisy and merry guests, in his shirt-sleeves, while a cook appeared in an adjacent doorway from time to time, — a rubicund priest presiding over the fish and fowl frizzling in oil on the altar of hotel sacrifice.

Gerard forgot to eat, in absorbed contemplation of this new type of humanity: the men bronzed, vigorous, with curling black hair and white teeth, their movements betraying sturdy independence and quick temper; the women vivacious and handsome, with handkerchiefs of red and yellow tints knotted around their necks, and strings of coral beads or chains of fine gold depending over the breast.

The sky was serenely blue, and the ambient atmosphere full of some quickening and hitherto unknown impulse of joy and life. Beyond the boundary-wall, a church-tower rose in a slender shaft of red and white marbles, which glistened with rosy reflections; and a flock of snowy pigeons circled about the parapet.

The scene and the hour caught up the soul of this young pilgrim in sudden, inexpressible rapture, even as the birds cleft the radiant air on strong, outspread pinions.

He left the table, and passed through the low corridor of the *osteria* out into the *campo*.

The revellers of the garden glanced at the full wine-flask and untasted food, with ready gibe at the moonstruck bearing of the foreigner; while the landlord prudently gathered together the viands, and returned them to the larder.

In the *campo* the old hooker and the dwarf waylaid Gerard. The manikin, in mingled French and English, tendered his own services as cicerone. The patriarch knew intimately a *gondoliere*, who was an honest man, and would take the *signore* about Venice as no other of the craft could.

Gerard, framing shyly his first faltering sentences of Italian, declined both overtures.

Foiled, the dwarf seated himself on a flight of mouldy steps, and clasped his hands about his knee. The patriarch in the ragged cloak leaned on his staff, and grumbled in his beard, —

“The son of a dog prefers to walk.”

“Patience, grandfather,” rejoined the dwarf, with a swift glance over his shoulder at the

inn. "He must come back to us sooner or later."

The artist wished to lose himself in the labyrinth of byways opening before him, to scan the features of the town, and probe her secrets, as he could not do in a gliding boat. He followed the narrowest fissures of *calli* between lofty buildings in the shadow of overhanging balconies, and deeply carved doorways, and became entangled in the most tortuous mazes of bridge and passage, without reference to guiding clew of white stone as marking the route to Rialto.

Now he emerged on a quay thronged with sailors, and where the sea gathered her varied craft: Dalmatian coasters freighted with wine; *bragozzi* laden with the night's fishing, a weathercock sparkling at the mast-head, and wide-spreading sails, orange and brown, displaying such devices as Titian's Madonna of the Assumption, or flying angels; the peninsular steamers jetting forth columns of smoke from their funnels; and the tiny *sandolo* darting across the canal like an insect.

Hours elapsed while Gerard, silent and entranced, watched these sails detach from shore,

inflate before the wind, and slip away over the gray waters to the verge of the horizon.

Then he rambled on, a turn bringing him in the midst of a fish-market; cuttles such as the Greek sailors once sacrificed to the sea-gods, heaped with crabs and shrimps, and the quivering life of sturgeon, tench, pike, eels, or barbel. Nasal venders besieged him to buy necklaces made of the tiny iridized shells gleaned from the weeds about Murano, as *fior-di-mare*, Liliputian turtles, and pearly valves fashioned into portemonnaies.

A canal beyond, deep jade-green in shadow, laved the steps of a church, with open portal revealing glimpses of a mosaic dome, columns of jasper and alabaster, and a gilded altar where tapers gleamed in the rich obscurity, and clouds of incense floated about the carved chancel stalls.

The artist discovered everywhere the outward expression of a love of color in the people with whom he now mingled; in the marble mouldings and panels of arch and cor-tile, veined with amethyst, purple, and Egyptian porphyry; in the vivid scarlet tint of a vine swaying in the breeze from the sculptured

urn of a garden wall ; in the glow of crimson lamps before a wayside shrine ; in the fruit piled in luscious abundance in the dingiest shop, or the pot of pitch in the shed of the gondola-builder, with dusky workmen coming and going beneath the low russet-brown roof.

In all these scenes, strange, vivid, and exquisitely beautiful, Gerard sought an object he did not find. The sense of loss and vague disappointment gained upon him, and oppressed his spirit. His limbs grew weary, his head heavy, and his mood, buoyant to the verge of intoxication at the outset, now depressed and sad. Loneliness, languor, profound discouragement, clogged his movements, and chilled the warm impulse of hope recently born in his breast. In this extremity of indecision, amounting to weakness, he evoked the familiar images of boyhood, but the effort brought no re-action. Spent, dejected, despairing, he moved across the piazzetta mechanically.

The glory of sunset had transfigured the Sea City on her margin of sands. The sky flamed to crimson where the clouds gathered in threatening masses above the Euganean

Hills ; the pearly waters warmed to rose and gold ; while the domes of churches, the façades of palaces, the spanning bridges, caught the glow on stained fresco, sparkling mosaic, and the mellow brick of portal, embrasure, and balcony.

A clang of bells smote the ear, vibrating and echoing in a sudden tumult of sound that shook the towers, and made the air pulsate, then died away to silence again.

The young pilgrim found himself, almost without volition, in the precincts of St. Mark's, at a moment when the apse was one blaze of gold in the western sunlight. His mind was no longer capable of clearly and firmly grasping facts. The city seemed unreal, fantastic, a mirage sprung from the lagoon. The interior of the church was sumptuous, overwhelming, yet intangible.

A woman emerged from the gloom of a remote corner, and paused in the flood of yellow light while a companion knelt at a side altar.

This woman, young and majestic in bearing, neither prayed nor bowed her head, but stood with hands clasped, gazing into space, absorbed in her own painful meditations. The

golden mist of sunshine, and the golden radiance of mosaic and altar, shed a transitory magnificence over her raiment, converting mere flimsy stuff into glistening tissues, and defined the beauty of low brow, black hair, and olive pallor, even as the sunset was glorifying the city by a warm effulgence of color.

Gerard Grootz halted, and looked at her. She was a vision, vivid, unexpected, dark, even threatening, such as Heine beheld when listening to Paganini's playing, reclining on a couch in a chamber decorated *à la Pompadour*, with little mirrors and cupids, amidst a graceful and harmonious confusion of Chinese porcelain, flowers, and lace.

For a moment the woman stood thus, then turned away, and disappeared.

Gerard did not attempt to follow and detain her. A sudden thrill swept over his body. He had found the missing clew. The woman, by her very presence, in crossing the luminous space of church, had supplied the want, and filled his soul with contentment. She was the embodiment of the Venice he sought, Greek, Byzantine, Renaissant, holding the gorgeous East in hostage, and safeguard of the West,

emblem of fading glories and past strength. He drank deeply of the mystical draught of inspiration she seemed to proffer him in passing, and was refreshed.

Night found Gerard at a *café* remote from the inn of the Mezza-Luna.

He entered a gondola, and glided away with a ghostly celerity through the twilight. Darkness was already stealing softly over the waters, while the horizon retained the pale transparency of beryl and chrysoprase hues against which the masts and spars of the shipping were defined in delicate yet sharp relief of outline. The lights of the piazza shed a luminous track across the canal, and illuminated the church of San Giorgio Maggiore opposite.

Suddenly a fleet of boats swept into view from the sombre depths of palace wall, their garlands of tinted lamps swaying like tremulous blossoms blown about by the wind.

In the midst was a galley, with a statue of Fame at the prow, and draperies of silk and azure *crêpe*, silver-fringed, rippling down to the water. Guided by *gondoliere* in ancient livery of slashed doublet, silken hose, and plumed hat, the craft shimmered and sparkled

with trophies of Venetian glass, ruby and opal.

The pageant was a serenade in honor of a prince travelling incognito; and when the music ceased, a discreet patter of applause from a balcony testified the approbation of the royal party. Then the orchestra breathed forth fresh strains of Wagner, Verdi, and Donizetti; the lights shifted from pink and blue to emerald fires, with starry reflections; and the crowd of spectators on quay, bridge, and in thronging boats, burst into a rapture of responsive admiration.

Surely here was an expiring gleam of former magnificent hospitality, in keeping with the faded loveliness of the city; or were the tinsel draperies and cheap lamps to be accepted as emblematic of modern and inevitable change?

The prince on the balcony yonder, a stout and commonplace gentleman in a black coat, had arrived in the *coupé* of a daily train, instead of on board of a galley manned by four hundred oarsmen, and followed by other craft resplendent with tapestries, armor, and cloth of gold, as King Henry III. of France once came, sweeping past the Arch of Triumph at

San Nicolò del Lido, designed by Palladio, and painted by Tintoretto and Paul Veronese.

The queen, a cheerful and dumpy little woman in an ulster and brown straw hat, has been sketching on the lagoons all day, instead of appearing in state jewels on the Bucintoro, in company with the Doge and Dogaressa, like Bianca, bride of Francesco Sforza.

The Tunisian ambassadors, in cream-colored burnous and fez, have come to witness the launching of an iron-plated corvette, and fetch the king some Arab steeds, with ultimate project of establishing a line of steamers between Tunis and Italian ports ; instead of being *fêted* by the Venetian Republic for three months, as were the Tartar emissaries of bygone centuries, and laden with gifts of swords, pearls, brocade, and velvet, for the Great Mogul.

Gerard Grootz, by a supple turn of the oar, was swept on to peaceful stillness and desertion along the Giudecca shore. The stars gleamed in the sky far above him, and a mist rose from the sea, gradually obliterating the islands, and rendering vague the outline of the city. He was alone in the darkness of the Southern night.

Later, the dwarf plucked the grandfather's cloak. Both were crouching on a flight of steps, loath to seek the hole they called a home, as long as neighbors were abroad. The old hooker Giovanni nodded drowsily. The dwarf Pippo, alert, wiry, and bright-eyed, munched a morsel of *piave* bread.

"The stranger is coming back," said the manikin, arousing his companion to professional duties.

The old man stumbled to his feet with a muttered curse.

"He's not much good," was his comment, as the gondola approached.

Pippo raised his nose in the air with a movement full of mockery and assurance. Seated in the shadow of the archway at midnight, he looked like a fit instrument of the Venetian Inquisition, born too late by a century or two, to glide near, with hint and artful innuendo, and place the poisoned shaft of calumny in the hand capable of using it.

"As to that, granddaddy, we shall see tomorrow what can be done with this artist," was his dignified response.

Gerard entered the inn, and sought the

small chamber assigned to him at an earlier hour.

He unfastened his portmanteau, scattered about his modest store of clothing and linen, and opened, with a certain lingering affection, the painter's portfolio, which contained a few sketches. In these leaves, fragmentary, hasty, incomplete, he read clearly the history of his own life.

Old Elias Heins, first benefactor, had vanished almost as swiftly as the mill and homestead of the Rhine bank in the fog of the autumn morning; leaving, as a tangible substitute, that more substantial embodiment of active benevolence, Jacob Van Limburg. One may readily imagine Elias Heins laughing in his sleeve at such clever manipulation of humanity, as he flew off at a tangent in the direction of Courland before winter closed in.

Jacob Van Limburg had experienced a lively interest in the rustic lad, who swooned in the first ecstasy of beholding the treasures of his picture-gallery. In this *naïve* tribute to the judgment of an amateur, the merchant scorned to discern the bewilderment of an

awakened intelligence, and the weakness of an empty stomach.

He had personally conducted Gerard to the fountain source of an art-school, where the boy studied with ardor, following the course prescribed by the master with docile obedience, and maintaining an individuality amidst a class of jovial comrades, fond of the tavern, pipe, and bowl, of an evening, as Adrian Brauwer and Jan Steen had been in their time.

“Unconventional,” was the doubtful verdict of the master, a dry person, learned in all the technicalities of instruction, and prudent about quitting well-ordained boundaries of limitation, either in subject or treatment.

“A stupid fellow,” was the judgment of the jolly fellow-students, irritated by Gerard’s prudence as much as his cold indifference to their pastimes.

In the fourth year, Gerard had become moody, restless, intractable. He begged permission to haunt the Van Limburg gallery, and remained for hours with haggard features and idle fingers, questioning the Venetian portrait.

Giorgione was the artist who had painted

that head, replete with pride, distinction, and elegance. Who was Giorgione? Venice was the city delineated in the background of the picture, with the domes and palaces swathed in soft mists. Where was Venice? Giorgione and Venice! These two magical words formed the chord of deep meaning in the great symphony of art and color to which the youth dedicated himself soul and body. His ignorance of all matters outside of the walls of a studio was profound. His mind represented a range of notes, beyond which, at either extremity, is immeasurable void and silence. He relegated all the other works of the gallery, with a disdain as capricious as it was unmerited, — the golden and peaceful landscapes of Ostade and Cuyp, the gloomy skies of Ruysdael, the careful brush of Metzu in depicting aristocratic surroundings to the rank of William Kalf's still-life, and the flower-studies of John Van Huysum, or David de Heem.

Giorgione and Venice! Meinheer Van Limburg, again whimsically observant of this silent *protégé*, read the troubled longing in the boy's blue eyes, — to go there, to yonder

Sea City! To become, like him, the genius of Castelfranco!

The merchant meditated. How many eager young aspirants of fame had pressed panting towards the same goal of fulfilment, before Gerard Grootz! How many more will arise with succeeding generations to tread the same path! Did the benefactor believe in the ability of Gerard? Not too much. The seed had laid dormant in a favorable soil of study and opportunity, without yielding fruit. Meinheer Van Limburg assured his own self-esteem that he had truly given the youth the same advantages as the melons and grapes of his hot-houses.

“Your genius seems to me to be only a stupid boy,” remarked the merchant’s wife on more than one occasion.

Madame Van Limburg was a stout lady, invariably attired in rustling silks, satins, and brocade, and much interested in orphan-asylums and other works of charity.

The merchant thereupon made a compromise between domestic disapproval and personal scepticism of talent. He gave Gerard a commission to paint the portrait of his eldest

daughter, then a blooming maiden of eighteen years.

The novice accepted the task with feverish alacrity. He placed his model in a casement embowered in plants, with several jars filled with tulips in the background, and in the act of peeping into one of those adjustable mirrors which reflect the street.

Rachel Van Limburg was amiable, impressionable, and romantic in temperament. The artist craved human sympathy; and his nature began to unfold like the sensitive-plants, with leaves previously coiled on the defensive, in the presence of the blond-haired occupant of the window.

One day the father, prompted by his wife and Rachel's governess, decided that the maiden had gazed into the mirror, and the painter at her features, quite long enough.

The result was a study, fresh and charming, if a trifle mannered in the adjustment of the drapery. Madame Van Limburg pursed up her lips, and contemplated the completed portrait in silence. The *dame de compagnie* shook her head, and scrutinized the artist askance. Meinheer Van Limburg paid Gerard a suffi-

cient sum for the work to take him to Venice, and maintain him there for a year. After such a term of probation the fledgeling must try his own wings in self-support, and make a career for himself.

Rachel Van Limburg burst into tears when she was informed that the picture was destined for a gift of her intended husband, a banker of Antwerp, and wrote a pathetic little poem about the withered flowers of the embrasure where she had dreamed so long, — an effusion destroyed before her wedding-day.

Casement and occupant faded from the memory of Gerard Grootz. If to forget is the strength of great souls, he possessed the trait in an eminent degree. His nature was the plant absorbing all the dew and sunshine of bounty in his fellow-creatures in a ready assimilation. Thus the journey had been undertaken with joyful elation and ardent anticipation, hope lending wings to his feet. In the Sea City he would find power of utterance. In the Sea City he would commence to live.

The artist thrust aside his portfolio with a sigh, and sought his pillow. Years before, when Elias Heins had taken him to Amster-

dam, the novel objects seen during the day crowded his brain, and deprived him of repose. Sleep did not come to him more readily now.

He rose, and went to the window. He wished to assure himself that the Sea City had not vanished from sight.

The night, at the hour before dawn, was weird, solemn, melancholy. Beyond the bridges and quays was the wide expanse of sea and heavens, but the waters rustled and lapsed below in deep shadow with faint sobbings lost in the almost palpable darkness. On the opposite corner of the *campo* was a palace, now obscure in the night. Gerard had not previously noticed the building, and now it inspired in him an indefinable sense of dread.

As he gazed at the mansion, a ray of light traversed the upper story, vague, tremulous, and pale as a wandering moonbeam. Curiosity and a chill current of repulsion swept over him, forcing him to watch the light. The faint gleam emanated from the central window of the third floor, where a shutter swung free, as if recently opened.

A man stood in the middle space, within

the balcony, tall and thin in figure ; and while he remained in shadow, Gerard saw his head and profile reflected on the curtain and wall beyond.

It was one of those photographic and instantaneous impressions of a lean, aquiline face, with prominent nose and chin, and long hair falling over the shoulders, which the eye of an artist seizes with unerring perception and almost unconsciously.

Gerard bent over the window-ledge to glance down the canal on the left ; and when he again turned towards the house, both lamp and man had disappeared in the pervading stillness and gloom.

The young pilgrim stretched forth his hand with a gesture of restored self-confidence and exultation. The Sea City was his own, from her loftiest tower and marble-incrusted palaces to her hoarded treasures of art. Her children were all his slaves, compelled to do his bidding, from the haughtiest noble of the past, as well as the little dwarf of to-day, to the Greek Dogaressa Theodora, fresh from her bath of dew and rosewater, and the dark-eyed daughter of the fruit-vender, stringing beads in the

doorway of a summer afternoon. He held them all in the grasp of his hand.

When slumber touched his eyelids, he once more saw the woman standing in the golden glory of western sunlight of the church apse.

“Hers were the eyes which, over and beneath,
The sky and sea bend on thee, — which can draw,
By sea, or sky, or woman, to one law,
The allotted bondman of her palm and wreath.”

Then a voice mingled with his dreams, —
“She is the empress of the East, but she is
also Venice.”

CHAPTER III.

A YOUNG PILGRIM.

THE following day was the festival of All Saints. The first interest of the little dwarf Pippo was to look up the stranger who had come to lodge at the Inn of the Half-Moon.

Gerard was gone ; had eluded this vigilant imp, whose busy brain was already plotting means whereby to utilize his advent in the quarter. It was quite true that Gerard had vanished without drinking a matutinal cup of coffee.

The landlord, instigated by professional prudence, and the persistent inquiries of the dwarf, entered his chamber, and glanced about to discern traces of possible flight, with an unpaid bill pending. The portfolio lay open on a chair, while a pencil had fallen on the floor.

The *padrone* shrugged his broad shoulders.
“He will return,” he said easily.

The dwarf crept away again, grumbling under his breath.

Gerard did not come back on that day or the next. In the darkness of the third evening, a gondola again grated against the steps, and the young man sprang lightly out.

The old hooker and the dwarf awaited him.

"The *signore* has been long absent," said Pippo in a tone betraying anxiety and resentment.

"Yes," retorted Gerard, tossing him a *soldo*.

Then he went in to the *osteria*, made suitable explanation to his host, and entered his chamber, where he contemplated dreamily the familiar objects scattered about as he had left them.

Aroused from uneasy slumbers by the sounds of morning, the clinking of metal buckets at a neighboring well, and the cries of venders, the young pilgrim had risen, after the eve of All Souls, and gone forth to contemplate the dawn. His feet led him instinctively to the Riva degli Schiavone, where the multitude of sails had first charmed his eye by their variety and color. Impulse led him to board a Chioggian fishing-boat about to weigh anchor, and

voyage to the little town thirty miles distant on the southern lagoon. He had lingered, forgetful of time, prepared to mingle with the fisher-folk, and lead an existence free, wild, full of a picturesque variety, in studying the old houses with their red roofs and embrasured casements, and their inhabitants. The return of the boat Venice-wards once more reminded him of circumstance.

The artist, sheltered again in the inn, slept until noon the next day ; and then the house awakened him.

As distinctly as an inanimate object can confront and arouse a human being, by its mute significance, the house cast a spell on the dormant faculties of Gerard Grootz, quickening sensibility to acute wakefulness. He had turned his head on the pillow towards the unshuttered windows ; and, as he opened his eyes, the palace opposite seemed to be looking in on him. Gerard's heart throbbed with a pulsation of alarm, surprise, and dread. A conviction smote him that he was waited for and watched.

Houses have a distinctive physiognomy, as well as their inmates, gained in the lapse of

time ; and the aspect of this one was melancholy in desertion, sinister, even baffling. Robbed of the blotting shadow of midnight, when the feeble ray of light from the lamp of the upper story had failed to pierce the pervading obscurity, Gerard now discerned in the full noonday every detail, stain, and adornment of the structure.

In a first estate the *palazzo* had belonged to the Gothic type of the fourteenth century, combining lightness and grace with that appearance of solidity which is imparted by the heavy mouldings of arched portal, and the central casement, divided by twisted pillarettes, and opening on a balcony, — three stories in height : the ground floor, once serving as armory, bakery, and for offices, had small, irregular windows heavily barred, a door leading to a court on the side of the *campo*, and a water-gate on the canal with wooden valves, a wicket to inspect visitors, and a ponderous knocker in the form of a fish ; the *piano nobile* above, with the balcony ; and the third series with a similar window and balcony : the whole surmounted by projecting eaves and cornices and ornamented parapet, with balls and spires

bearing traces of gilding. This parapet verified the boast, that while other mediæval towns fortified turrets and towers, Venice adorned her roofs with a golden crown in the semblance of flower and fruit.

The artist noticed that the dilapidated green shutters of the upper story were now closed, and the hinges rusty.

For the rest, the mansion was the open page of a volume rich in the charm of suggestion of crumbling ornament, stucco, and fresco faded to russet tints; of mellow-toned brick, with marble shaft and archivolt about the embrasures, and sculptured corbels supporting the balconies; of hints and gleams of color which had once glorified the exterior in a freshness of magnificence. Beneath the lower balcony, a shield bore the coat-of-arms of the noble family to whom the palace had originally belonged, delicately wrought.

The delight of Gerard in dwelling on these details was that of all artists under similar circumstances.

At Florence, the severe Palazzo of the Signoria was built for the greater security of the rulers, as Macchiavelli affirmed: at Venice

the Doge's Palace, on the contrary, with all its arabesques, columns, galleries, and arches, resembles a poet's dream.

The opposite house had clearly fallen from a first glory into neglect, decay, and perhaps utter desertion ; yet it presented a certain dignity of stanch front and solid wall to a spying and curious public. Attracted, and at the same time repelled, by the habitation which had intruded on his very slumbers, Gerard rose, and made his simple toilet. He had scarcely finished dressing, when a confused murmur of voices, the sounds of chanting, and strains of music, drew him to the window.

The quarter celebrated on that day the *sagra* of its especial saint, irrespective of other portions of the city, and all the world. The procession had commenced to make a tour of the quarter for the purpose of incensing each shrine, and was visible approaching in a wavering line of color around the crooked *calli* and *campi*, like a flame creeping about the base of the old houses.

The porters came first, divided into three bands, wearing ephods of red, white, or blue over their working-clothes, and bearing aloft

banners, heavy crosses, and candelabra. Then followed the sacristan, clad in scarlet, ringing his bell, and preceding the musicians, and three little acolytes swaying silver censers. In the midst walked the old priest, in gorgeous vestments and laces, protected by an embroidered canopy, and holding the Host. A crowd of men and women joined in the chant, the former bareheaded, and the latter wearing veils. The banners and crosses sparkled in the sunshine; the incense curled upward in fragrant wreaths on the still air; the voices rose and fell, mingling with flute, trombone, and clarinet.

Gerard recognized the dwarf Pippo in the crowd; and the latter, catching his eye, removed his hat with a salutation of elaborate politeness.

At the same moment the door of the Gothic palace gave egress to a man of mature age. This man, of a vulpine cast of features, sallow in complexion, and with hair and whiskers already tinged with gray, crossed the *campo*, his brow contracted, like a person absorbed in thought, his eyes fixed on the ground, and entered a dark shop situated on the opposite

corner of the canal. He did not notice the pageant.

The artist then became aware that the central window of the sombre mansion had been thrown open, as if in obedience to the common impulse of the neighborhood. His attention was speedily riveted on the occupants of the balcony, with a sentiment of surprise and pleasure.

A young girl as fresh, beautiful, and smiling as the morning, leaned forward to greet friends in the throng below, with gestures both graceful and full of a childish gayety.

Beside her stood the woman who had dazzled the waking and sleeping thought of the young pilgrim on the day of his arrival at Venice. Her attitude now, as then, betrayed a languid indifference to the brilliant spectacle, or some mental pre-occupation.

Gerard asked himself if she could actually be there, across the narrow span of *campo*, instead of fading, merging into one of those processions of saints in the golden background of a church mosaic, after the western light had passed away, and the shadows had begun to lengthen down nave and chancel. He had

not expected to again see her. She had supplied the chord in the symphony otherwise incomplete and imperfect.

The morning touched caressingly the blonde head, and full white throat, and rounded chin of the young girl, while dealing more harshly with her companion. Haggard, with great lustrous eyes veiled by heavy lashes, and a wave of black hair sweeping low over the brow, and a sullen droop about the fine, sharply defined features, she looked old beyond her years; a penitent worn by fruitless vigils; a lamp in which the spirit flame is burned out.

A third figure stood behind the pair, — a stout woman, nurse or attendant, vivacious, warmly colored, wrinkled, and with gray hair, whose movements evinced brusque good-humor and familiarity.

The eye of Gerard Grootz softened as it rested on the young girl, in her frock of crimson stuff with a knot of red ribbons coquettishly adjusted as if to attract the admiration of the crowd; but his cheek paled with some subtle and inexplicable emotion in contemplating her companion, clad in a loose robe of

purple hues, with a handkerchief of amber silk carelessly knotted about the throat.

The procession advanced in a desultory fashion, the banners waving, the tapers flickering, and the voices chanting. Clusters of faces appeared at the windows of the houses, while strips of carpet and flags suspended from the ledge enhanced the gayety of the scene. The adjacent bridge was decked with garlands, and draped with mats of vivid hues; and as the priest gained the summit of the arch he paused, and elevated the host. The music and the chanting ceased, and the crowd knelt.

Gerard turned involuntarily towards the balcony. The young girl and the servant had fallen on their knees. The other woman withdrew a pace in the chamber, and remained stubbornly erect. Contempt, regret, fierce impatience, even despair, were the emotions plainly discernible on her mobile features as her glance encountered that of the stranger opposite.

A dull sense of oppression weighed on his breast; an exclamation, which was half a cry, escaped his lips under the spell of her look. Oh for the power to transfuse that living

image on canvas! Oh, to behold that face, so strange and vivid in the power of life, grow in human semblance beneath his brush! Who was she? What was she? A creature who refused to bend in obedience to a common law of religion.

The parish celebrated the festival of the saint with song, laughter, and the true enjoyment of devotion. Instinct with that local patriotism which rendered Dante's quarter of Florence a narrow sphere complete in itself, this nook of Venice had its own customs, saint, witch, doctor, historical association, and even peculiarities of accent, such as rendered it superior to all other quarters of the Sea City, not excluding San Marco and the Grand Canal. Was not the saint the daughter of a Doge, whose early development of an edifying piety had led her to dream dreams and see visions in childhood, until she built a church in fulfilment of a vow, after a visitation of the plague of unusual severity?

The *giro* completed, of wafting incense before each street shrine, the procession ebbed back to the sanctuary once more, whither Gerard followed.

He speedily found himself in the church, which was small, built of red and white marble, and surmounted by a Byzantine cross. The medallion of a Greek emperor was inserted in the vestibule. A rose window shed a jewelled light down upon the pavement of the aisles. He paused near an altar decorated with pyramids and clusters of tapers set amidst wreaths of artificial roses and gauzy draperies. Above the altar was a picture of St. George, a graceful youth with fair hair floating over his shoulders, as he spurred forward his spirited charger, and levelled his spear at the dragon already writhing beneath the hoofs of the horse. The rescued princess stood in the background with clasped hands.

There was a slight movement in the crowd, and the young girl of the balcony pressed eagerly forward, closely followed by the middle-aged attendant.

The girl's face was raised to the altar and the galaxy of lights in an ecstasy of delight or of devotional rapture.

"See, Gesualda *mia*! How fine the San Giorgio is to-day, with all these flowers," whispered the girl.

“I see, my child,” replied Gesualda, making a rapid genuflection before a shrine.

“Oh, look at the altar of Our Lady of Mercy! It shines like gold and precious jewels,” continued the girl, brushing Gerard’s shoulder with her sleeve in her excitement.

The glance of the young man sought in vain the third member of this family group.

A sudden current of air swept one of the tinsel draperies over a candle, and a fragment dropped blazing to the marble steps. The servant uttered a shriek of terror, for the wreath had fallen upon her young mistress.

To snatch the spray from its hold on her garments, and crush the mass beneath his foot, was Gerard’s swift movement.

The girl flushed with alarm, grew pale, and sobbed. She turned upon the young man a look of eloquent gratitude, and allowed her nurse to lead her away, who grumbled and scolded now that all danger was over.

The accident, which might have so readily become a tragedy, passed without interrupting the mass, or being known by those praying in remote portions of the sacred edifice.

Emerging once more from the church, the

artist was accosted by the dwarf: "The gentleman likes our *contrada*?"

Oh, yes! Gerard found much to admire in the quarter.

"The *signore* had better select quarters here, then," Pippo insinuated, cocking his head on one side. "Many foreign artists have dwelt with us, and preferred the locality to any other. The homes of the great Titian and Tintoretto are not far distant. Would the *signore* wish to be shown the dwellings of those illustrious men?"

Gerard shook his head, and returned to the inn. The words of the dwarf lingered in his mind, however. He must choose a studio. Where? His gaze swept the *campo*, the angle of bridge and canal, and rested on the opposite palace. To be near that house, with the inmates, was a first instinct. He smiled half-shyly; and, taking up his sketch-book, began to make a design of the balcony.

In the city of the balcony, rendered poetical by centuries of association, the artist drew curve and railing and volute as a frame to hold some fair woman.

“I may go to another part of the town; and the light is good to-day,” he reasoned, as if self-extenuation were necessary.

The dwarf Pippo remained outside, plying his trade in honor of the saint. He carried a little cage, which held four parrakeets. These birds, gift of a sailor, not only had glossy green plumage and crests of feathers, but were trained to draw a number from a box, which corresponded with a leaflet from a book of fortune, on the payment of a *soldo*. The parrakeets were the constant companions of their odd master, the confidants of his secrets, the pets of his childish moods, the objects of his care, day and night. He had christened them gravely Giovanni, Matteo, Maria, and Lucia. Giovanni was the most reliable bird of the tiny comrades, and never failed to display suitable zeal in business, while the rest were inconsequent on occasion. The public smiled and frowned on these sooth-sayers, now buying fortune-cards as the day of the lottery-drawing approached, and again waxing sceptical with failure.

Pippo suddenly traversed the bridge, and sought the shop entered by the middle-aged

man at an earlier hour, at the corner of the canal.

The place consisted of a series of chambers, separated by arches, and containing the pictures, bronzes, and inlaid furniture of a bric-a-brac dealer.

Daniele Falcioni was a merchant, banker, collector, and usurer in one.

The dwarf, hugging his bird-cage under one arm, demanded to see the *padrone*, of an assistant who was mending the brass-work of a cabinet. Shown into the presence of Daniele Falcioni, the little man was in no wise abashed by the irritable expression of the collector. He took from his pocket a morsel of paper twisted, unfolded, and drew forth a coin.

"I found this piece between the stones of the cortile yonder," he said, observing the dealer slyly as he spoke.

Falcioni took the coin between his finger and thumb, scrutinizing the date, and then returned it.

"You might have spared yourself the trouble either of finding or bringing me such rubbish," he said in a dry tone.

"Then the *signore* will not buy it of a poor

orphan, even on our *festa*," said Pippo, with a wheedling persuasiveness of look and gesture.

"No," retorted the antiquarian.

"Try a lucky number with the birds," persisted the dwarf.

"It is better to earn fortune," was the contemptuous rejoinder; and, turning to the letters on the desk, as if resenting the intrusion, Falcioni dismissed him.

The assistant admonished Pippo to depart, by a rapid pantomime.

"It seems that the *padrone* has an attack of the nerves to-day," he explained in a discreet undertone.

"May the fiends take all Jews to purgatory!" murmured Pippo, when safely outside of the door.

Then he seated himself on his favorite flight of steps, and meditated for a long time.

Child of the quarter, where he shared the crust of the grandfather, he clung tenaciously to the very stones of his native city, dreaming of no other existence than that rounded by the fiery summers of her quays, and the freezing winters of her lagoons, with the cycle of festivals. Profoundly distrustful of the sea,

and all sea-craft, even to the familiar gondola, he haunted the canal brink, receiving the gifts of the treacherous elements, as his due, when brought to his very feet. He held his own with the populace by reason of the readiness and pungency of his wit, and an adroitness of movement in one long accustomed to threading the labyrinth of secluded by-ways and open piazza. He loved the pantomime, the puppet-booth, to haunt the footsteps of astrologer and fortune-teller, or hung entranced on the words of any improvisator and recitationist.

At length he threw back his head, and burst into cackling laughter. The result of his meditation evidently afforded him pleasure. Mingling once more with the crowd, his black eyes sparkled with malice; and his tongue found ready utterance in bandying gibe and jeer with his neighbors.

Day waned, and the *festa* waxed merrier with the advance of evening. The *campo* was illuminated; and oil-lamps twinkled in the casements where pictures of the saint, clad in a white robe, and with flowing hair, were suspended. The corner shrines were

transfigured by a galaxy of stars. The old palace was decorated with a row of tinted globes across the first balcony.

Cries resounded, extolling the excellence of the chestnuts roasting, the puff pastry, the cuttle-fish redolent of oil. The stalls of the venders were resplendent with light, in which the great brass dishes sparkled like suns.

From time to time, a Bengal fire shed a ghostly gleam across the animated scene, revealing the faces of the blonde and the brunette on the balcony with sudden splendor, then dying away through gradations of quivering rose and blue tints to comparative obscurity once more.

The dwarf Pippo mingled with the throng of dancers, now commencing to circulate in response to the inspiring strains of the music, and where La Furlana, cousin-german of the Tarantella, was traceable in the graceful evolutions of many a maiden. He chaffed the venders, and sniffed the blended odors rising from brasier and copper *casserolle*, munching the chestnuts the while. He sang odd refrains, snapped his fingers in the air, and

stamped on the ground, executing a grotesque sort of *pas seul*.

“Thou hast drunk too much of the new wine,” warned the grandfather, seated in the archway, and musing on past carnivals and pageants, when he also sang, danced, and jested as a young and active *gondoliere*.

But Pippo was not tipsy ; and his intoxication had a deeper source than the noise, lights, and movement of the annual *sagra*, in which he always delighted.

He took the coin from his pocket, and spun it deftly on the marble step.

“May the Devil fly away with all usurers and niggards !” he exclaimed aloud.

CHAPTER IV.

THE HOUSE OF THE MUSICIAN.

THE palace which had attracted the notice of the young foreign artist Gerard Grootz, not more for the richness of exterior than the living inmates, was known in the quarter as the house of the musician.

Leonardo Bardi, one of the most gifted violinists of the century, had dwelt and died here, leaving a fame untarnished in this nook of his native city, if reputed a spendthrift, a gambler, and a madman elsewhere. Nay, did not his eccentricities, his visionary abstractions, his outbursts of unreasonable passion and excitement, the transports amounting to delirium in moments of composition or execution, combined with a reckless generosity towards the poor, shed an additional lustre on his name?

The old men and women, seated in the doorway, or warming shrivelled limbs in the

sun of the *campo*, measured Leonardo Bardi by their own standard, and perhaps estimated him at his true value.

He was born over yonder, in an arrow *calle*, of a vigorous and noisy brood; and the musicians had early taken him up for his clever knack of playing the violin and singing. He had carried the head on the shoulder all his life, the old people opined, but he had a good heart.

Of the years devoted to study under exacting masters, these critics knew nothing. Of the triumphs of the violinist, as the fruit of unrelaxed toil, when the audiences of London, Paris, Berlin, or St. Petersburg hung entranced on the lightest vibration of the cords beneath his lean and supple fingers, and the spell of the weird harmonies wrought into subtle cadences by the bow he wielded moved humanity to pain, sadness, and tears more often than merriment, the old people knew still less, save in the gifts of jewels and wealth accruing to this favorite of fortune.

The events of his career were briefly summed up in the quarter, while imagination had free scope to embellish the history.

As a little boy his father had beaten him when wholesome correction was necessary ; for how was Giuseppe Bardi, the sailmaker, to know that Leonardo differed from the rest of the brood, Sandro, Maffeo, or Cesare ?

As a man of middle age, the musician had returned to Venice to be received with ovations for his unprecedented popularity elsewhere, and marry the beautiful Bianca Samazzi, daughter of that designing woman, the lace-merchant, sometime of Burano. A creature full of wiles and cunning the Samazzi, who mended the frayed meshes of lustrous webs with unequalled skill, and wove other meshes to entangle the souls of men the while. When she was married, Bianca Samazzi wore neither the traditional white robe and flowing tresses of Titian's Flora, nor the discreet black dress and veil of her years ; for the enamoured violinist literally enveloped her graceful form in the most costly lace to be procured from the hoard of noble ladies by her mother, and twined about her neck and in her blonde hair strings of pearls and other gems.

How radiant she was thus attired ! and so lithesome in her loveliness, that slander hinted

she had served as a model to a great sculptor before Leonardo Bardi saw and loved her.

Nothing less than the Gothic *palazzo*, henceforth to be known as the house of the musician, would suit the ambition of the women, mother and daughter. The violinist purchased and furnished the mansion sumptuously, and here his two daughters were born.

The palace had acquired an evil repute. Several tragedies had occurred within the walls, not the least of which was the violent death of the bride of the last noble of the race, who threw herself from the window of the second floor into the court, and fell into the well. The rash act was to escape the poniard of her jealous lord, it was rumored; and the sculptured lid of the well had since remained closed.

What cared the women Samazzi for these ugly tales? The wife basked in the luxury of her new sphere, insolently, capriciously, indolently. She possessed the true Venetian instinct of lavish extravagance, which led the wives of bakers to attire themselves in gold brocade at an earlier date of the Republic. The Signora Bardi, secure in the possession

of bewitching charms, was prepared to spend seven hours at her toilet, like her prototype of the Middle Ages ; to perfume her bath with musk, aloes, myrrh, and amber ; to study new modes of fashion ; to attach a black patch to cheek or chin, fraught with significance for the cavaliers perpetually hovering about her ; and wield her fan of ivory, tortoise-shell, or gold, gem-studded, in the same graceful warfare of encouragement and rebuke. The softest tissues, the most harmonious hues, became necessary to the woman who had strung beads in early girlhood, and esteemed herself fortunate to have a new gown for a *festa*. Lace and silk shrouded her bed in a gilded alcove, supported by two caryatides. Statues, pictures, and rich Eastern plants adorned the apartments ; *portières* of satin and damask were suspended over doors of carved woods ; while tables and brackets held vases, vessels of chased silver, enamelled dishes and boxes, or iridescent bubbles of Murano crystal.

A caprice of the beautiful woman was to transform the interior of her abode into a true paradise at night, by means of light shed from candelabra suspended from the ceiling or at-

tached to the walls, and Oriental lamps of gilded copper and bronze, engraved, and swaying from wrought chain and column, or lanterns gleaming with the variegated tints of painted glass.

Did she ever weary of her own image thus reflected in the mirrors garlanded with flowers, passing from shadow to full effulgence of wax candles, with fair arms and neck relieved by sombre draperies, and blonde tresses caught in the meshes of a golden net?

What feasting went on from night until morning! The old people knew, and could revel in a Barmecide feast of reminiscence even now, smacking withered lips at the bare mention of the delicacies enjoyed over yonder, whether served in the garden, a nook dedicated to love and the Graces, or in the large *sala* within doors.

A whet of sausage, truffles, and salad, was not likely to be forgotten before a meal when Oriental wines, the vintages of Hungary and Austria, as well as the frothing champagne, flowed so abundantly. Lampreys of Binasco, Friulli hams, sturgeon of Ferrara, Lombardy quail, Roman geese, thrushes of Perugia,

served with laurel and pepper, pastry of Genoa, all found their way to this hospitable table, with such imported luxuries as the palate of Leonardo Bardi might crave after years of travel. The majolica, glass, and silver dishes were filled with luscious fruit, — cherry, almond, muscatelle pear, apricots, grapes, prunes, and peaches, with great melons.

The musician, fantastic in moments of gayety, and yielding more and more to fits of gloomy abstraction, broke away from the spell which had held him in thrall for some years, and quitted Venice on a protracted professional tour. Possibly escape from the sweet slavery of mere human love, and a return to the true mistress of his life, music, awakened the rapture, the elation, the dreamy reveries, of his subsequent playing. The public of the great capitals welcomed him back with unwonted enthusiasm. At Vienna a party of students drew his carriage through the crowded streets, from theatre to hotel, in lieu of horses. At Nice a royal invalid sent him a diamond solitaire after a concert. The soul of the violinist spoke to his hearers in those days, through the medium of his exquisite execution, just as the

Stradivarius, tempered in sunshine, and fashioned in curves by the master's hand, full of a delicate meaning, in the Cremona workshop, is the soul of all harmonies in the subtile and thrilling pulses of the realm of sound.

Stormy, fitful, and then passionately appealing in an entrancing sweetness of pathos and expression, Leonardo Bardi, tall, gaunt, with haggard features and dishevelled hair, stood before the audience with veiled eyes, indifferent to the tumult of emotion he awakened in every breast.

In the Venetian palace, a tragic event stirred the surface calm of prosperity, as if arousing the slumbering elements of evil ever brooding over court and chamber. The wife was dressed for the opera, in diaphanous draperies, with a veil of tulle, studded with silver stars, gathered up over her head. She turned to admire this toilet in a long mirror; and the veil caught in a candle-flame, thus becoming a terrible winding-sheet. Her mother uttered piercing cries, and strove to extinguish the fire. In vain were her feeble efforts.

Both died on the following day.

Leonardo Bardi returned home to his terri-

fied family, and remained crushed by grief. His bereavement was profound and irreparable. He had forgotten the bride of a summer day, in absence and the absorption of his art. He now wept and raved over her tomb, in unavailing remorse and self-reproach.

From that date his behavior became more eccentric, and his periods of absence more prolonged. He passed his time chiefly at Paris and Vienna, where he became addicted to play.

The daughters grew to maidenhood in the old *palazzo*, under the care of a foster-mother. Gesualda was a native of the island of Burano, and nurse of the eldest girl Marina Bardi. A guardian brusque, narrow in her jealous vigilance, she was easily moved to indulgence by the artful cajoleries of her charge. Leonardo Bardi, as a father, now overwhelmed his children with affection, showering gifts upon them, or again neglected altogether their education.

On the tenth birthday of Marina, he brought toys from Parisian bazaars, which delighted the little girls, and announced a firm intention of never again quitting them or his native city.

The artless prattle of the children soon wearied him ; and as a compromise with his fixed resolution to remain in Venice, he withdrew to the third story, where he superintended repairs and alterations, and gathered together the musical instruments, books, pictures, and gifts bestowed upon him as a virtuoso.

For a period of three years Leonardo Bardi imparted a unique individuality to the house and the quarter by the singularity of his presence, and the charm of his gift. Strains of music stole forth from the open casements of an evening, and drew a throng of listeners to the *campo* ; or some capricious melody issuing from a gondola as it glided along the verge of gray lagoon, in the twilight, attracted other craft in the wake, as if in obedience to some magic spell.

Haunted by a feverish restlessness, the musician came and went at all hours, his gray hair floating over his shoulders in disorder, his raiment neglected, his features contracted, as if he were prey to some mental or moral strife. Quiet folk glanced significantly, as the end of it all, to a sinister building on a distant island.

But Leonardo Bardi was not destined to terminate his existence in a madhouse. His spirit yearned to return to the world. Or did the passion for gaming again assert irresistible sway over his nature?

The neighbors knew every detail of that departure. The father assured Gesualda that he had made due provision of bridal dowry for his two daughters, should any misfortune overtake him. Marina and Bianca were to perfect themselves in embroidery, and any accomplishments they might prefer, during his absence.

The seasons passed after that, and the voice of Marina Bardi, full, passionate, and rich, echoed through the silent house, instead of the weird note of her father's violin. This voice reached the ear of the soldier on the quay. From glance to smile and covert speech, from spark to fire of love: the old rhythm, forever new, lent the poetry of sweet meaning to the springtime, with the beautiful girl leaning over the balcony, and the young officer haunting the canal, the bridge, the piazza, if she moved abroad.

Then Leonardo Bardi came home, summoned by the faithful and tyrannical Gesualda.

Broken, shrivelled, spent, the musician appeared like the ghost of his former self, the ashes of an extinct volcano. Life had consumed him. He received his prospective son-in-law the captain with affability and golden promises.

The suitor, of a noble but impoverished Sicilian family, charmed the women by his grace of bearing and ardent devotion.

The lovers, under paternal sanction, were permitted to freely communicate their sentiments, and gaze into each other's eyes, either in the garden or the *sala*. Moments, hours, and days span the supreme happiness of many lives. The glow of triumph lent such radiance to the charms of Marina's seventeen years as dazzled her suitor, and attracted even the abstracted gaze of her parent, on the memorable night of which the town still gossiped. Marina's beauty, rich, strange, vivid, was that of a tropical flower.

The party had supped gayly near the open casement and balcony, and animation awoke in Leonardo Bardi. His eye sparkled with a sombre fire, and his speech grew rapid. His scrutiny of the betrothed couple became fur-

tive, speculative, even sinister. Dismissing the lover with a certain magniloquence of gesture and manner suggestive of the theatre, he paced the long *sala* with agitated step. Marina, wrapped in soft reveries of the future when she would go forth into the world, for the first time, on the arm of her husband, gazed at the stars and their reflection in the quivering ripples of the canal. The nurse and the young Bianca watched the long, fantastic shadow of the musician projected on the wall, as he moved.

Suddenly he paused, and regarded Bianca moodily.

"At least thou art too much of a child to require a bridal dowry yet," he said abruptly, and resumed his walk.

"What does he mean?" whispered the girl, with her arm around the neck of Gesualda.

"Who knows that he is prepared to portion more than one child?" retorted the nurse in a fierce undertone, knitting her brows, and setting her white teeth together.

Gesualda held her own ground tenaciously in loyalty to her charges, who were also her kinsfolk on the side of the grandmother; but

she resented with bitterness the indifference of Leonardo Bardi to all domestic relations. Some element of her displeasure infected the girl Bianca. Her father had not caressed and praised her since his return. Now he was prepared to thrust her still further aside as not requiring a bridal dowry.

On such slight threads as the jealous petulance of a spoiled child hung the culminating tragedy of the house of the musician.

Bianca kept a vigilant watch on the irresolute movements of her father. Her rosy lips pouted, and her brow clouded. She was suspicious and angry. He should not forget her! Three years the junior of Marina, the precocious Southern instincts of womanhood had awakened in the childish breast of Bianca in contemplating the happiness of the plighted lovers. She felt herself repulsed; but she stood on the fountain's brink of youth, and surveyed, with curiosity, her own reflected image. Soon her day would come!

Leonardo Bardi again paused in his promenade, but it was not to accost his wondering family. He passed one of his long, thin hands over his brow, and murmured, —

“Yes! Bianca is still too young to marry.”

Then he moved towards the door.

Bianca sprang after him.

“Where art thou going, *padre mio*?” she demanded sharply.

A glow of wrath, sudden, bitter, and intense, suffused the hollow visage of the musician. He turned upon his daughter, as if about to strike her; his lips quivered, unable to frame the words he desired to utter, and he pointed, with a shaking hand, to the ceiling.

He withdrew to the suite of rooms he had formerly fitted up for his own use on the third story.

When he was gone, Bianca stamped her foot, shed a few tears, and burst into vehement reproaches of the cruel neglect she suffered. The dreaming Marina was aroused from her reveries, and moved from the balcony. The soothing caresses of sister and nurse added fuel to the girl's wrath. She broke away from the arms encircling her, and ran up the stairs in pursuit of her father. Marina and Gesualda grew pale, and looked at each other. To intrude on the musician at such a moment, might be dangerous. They followed,

chilled by a mutual apprehension, yet determined to protect their pet.

Bianca tapped on the panel ; and then, terrified by her own temerity, drew back to the extreme limit of the landing.

Leonardo Bardi opened the door, and confronted the group.

“I shall need my bridal dowry soon. Do not forget me, *padre mio*.” The young girl spoke boldly, even resentfully ; but she pressed her clasped hands to her heart as if to check the tumultuous pulsations of fear aroused by her own act.

The musician looked above her head into space. One would have said that he was troubled by some ghostly vision. A mortal pallor overspread his features ; his limbs became rigid ; his eyes mechanically fixed, and devoid of light. The hair on his head appeared to bristle with dread.

“I will not forget, my child,” he replied at length in a gentle tone, and again withdrew, closing the door of his own apartment.

That was the last ever seen of Leonardo Bardi in life. Next morning he was found extended on the floor of the *sala*, which

formed the principal chamber of the private suite. He held a small pistol in one hand. Near him on the rug lay a long, keen knife, and a key. No trace of violence was perceptible. No written word of farewell to his children was discoverable. The muffled report of a weapon had been audible in the dawn. More than one denizen of the quarter recalled the circumstance, when the news spread abroad. The household had slept, — Gesualda heavily, Marina lulled to roseate dreams, and Bianca with the childish *abandon* of weariness after tears and chagrin.

The worldly affairs of the virtuoso were found to be hopelessly involved, owing to the extravagant caprices of his career, and he left no testament of any kind. The passion for play which had drawn him back to club and casino, after the death of his wife, had plunged him into a vortex of feverish excitement, from which he had seldom attempted to extricate himself. The fitful impulse of self-reproach and remorse had doubtless brought him home to arrange the happy marriage of his eldest daughter with the lover of her own selection.

The family was left in possession of the

Venetian palace, with the furniture and rich appointments, and absolutely nothing besides. In vain Gesualda searched box and cabinet for concealed hoard, or valuable paper, then relapsed into the piercing lamentations of mourning. A few gold coins scattered amidst the linen of a portmanteau, a valuable chronometer, and some trinkets comprised the inheritance of the musician's daughters, of the fortune which he had earned so easily by his incomparable improvisations, and valued so lightly.

Slain by his own hand? Why? Marina and Gesualda looked at each other over the blonde head of Bianca. Did the full knowledge that he had no wedding portion to give either child push him to take the desperate step of self-destruction, after the young girl followed him up-stairs with the warning that soon she must demand her dowry, in turn, of so unfaithful a steward as her own father?

Poignant grief over the rash act, and the loss of a parent, mingled with a terrified consciousness of their own helplessness and destitution, smote each of the trio.

Gesualda had not ventured to touch the

pistol, fraught with such ghastly associations, or the knife; but she took the key, and speedily fitted it into a chest. Her eager curiosity was only doomed to fresh disappointment, for the contents of the chest proved to be some books and loose sheets of music. Why did Leonardo Bardi hold the key in his last moments?

The nurse, passionately loyal to her foster-children, and all in weeping convulsively as the bier, covered with a velvet pall, was borne away in silence, made a combination for the lottery out of the age of the musician, the day of the month, and the hour when he was found. The *terno* lost, yet she kept the numbers in her head, and took the dwarf Pippo into her confidence, not only for the little service of purchasing the ticket, but to mark the figures on the wall of the stairway with a bit of charcoal.

Marina, pale and subdued in bereavement, was upheld by her new-found hope. The joy of loving and being loved in the blossoming of a warm, luxuriant nature, was too fresh and strong within her breast, to be dashed aside, even by the shock of death. She ex-

perienced for the handsome stranger that sudden, overwhelming passion, ardent, generous, and uncalculating, which wrapped her about in a separate atmosphere. She smoothed the hair of her young sister as Bianca buried her head in the cushions of a sofa, a prey to tempestuous grief, with consolatory words, while watching for one who did not come.

The officer never returned; had, in fact, availed himself of an exchange of duty, and quitted Venice, actuated by some prudent calculation, as Goldoni evaded matrimonial entanglements in his day. Alas! there were eyes as dark as those of Marina Bardi in every garrison town, and balconies awaiting wooers in the springtime.

Such was the third misfortune which had befallen the Bardi family in the Gothic *palazzo*.

The neighbors began to shake their heads, and hint that the house of the musician was an abode of ill omen. Gesualda counted her beads in a corner, with her teeth chattering, as if from deadly cold.

The intense agony of suspense in long waiting, the fierce and proud conflict with

doubt and despair, quenched the bloom of Marina's cheek, so softly rounded. Her father's singular restlessness became apparent in her whole being; for hers was the organization, —

“ Bounteously made,
And yet so finely, that a troublous touch
Thinned, or would seem to thin her, in a day;
A joyous to dilate, as towards the light.”

Blind obedience to the dictates of her religion was the first impulse of an overburdened heart. There was not a church, altar, or shrine in Venice where the black-robed figure of Leonardo Bardi's daughter did not pray; not so much for the repose of the dead as the return of the living. In the cold dawn, and the gathering twilight, she glided about aisle, cloister, and chancel; now pouring out her soul and life in wild supplications for aid, and again lost in an ecstasy, a delirium of hope that the response to the appeals with which she had wearied Heaven and the ear of all pitying, intervening saints, was about to be fulfilled in the re-appearance of her lover. Her cheeks grew hollow, her eyes wan, her

frame wasted, in the vigils which saved her from the frenzy of insanity.

One night Gesualda confronted her on the stairway. Marina's hair was wet with rain, and her breathing rapid.

Gesualda knew that she had been consulting the wise woman of the parish, and carried some love philter concealed in her bosom. Old Maria Bracciaforte, a crone learned in medicine and witchcraft, came of a family of sorcerers, and dwelt over the fruit-shop. For her quarter, old Maria was the Circe of Homer, the Canidia of Horace, the Simætha of Theocritus, and the Libyan sorcerer, in one; and if she did not mutter spells to raise storms at sea, seek poisonous herbs at midnight, wherewith to slay enemies, make wax images thrust full of pins to waste the life of living victim, at least she kept alive her fame by dealing in raven's wings, crystals, virgin parchments, and a dead man's skull. Gesualda was not above consulting the witch herself, on occasion.

"Why are you abroad so late?" demanded the nurse reproachfully.

Marina laughed bitterly.

“Who would care to harm such as I?” she retorted.

Gesualda averted her eyes, and continued in a sombre tone, —

“The dwarf Pippo brings a message.”

“From him? Speak!” cried Marina hoarsely, and seizing the arm of her faithful companion.

“Ay; the message was from him fast enough,” Gesualda exclaimed. “Devil! Wretch! Reptile! May his children rise to curse him in his old age! He went away when he heard the bad news. He cannot even write, but must needs send a message by another officer, some dandy of the piazza, through our little Pippo.”

The blunt and pugnacious temperament of the nurse, daughter of sea-folk, thus found vent in anger and scorn of the faithless lover.

Sharp measures may have been best. Marina shrank back with flaming eyes and quivering features.

“He has not even asked me to go away with him, when I would have followed him to the end of the world,” she panted, in ac-

cents of despair. "I would have been his slave, his servant."

From that hour she ceased to haunt the shrines of Madonna and saint, and refused to bow her head even at the elevation of the Host. Re-action from fervent appeal, and the desertion of her lover, rendered her sullen and an unbeliever.

How often the creed is made responsible, in childish wrath, for the failure of some miracle-working Madonna to cure illness and misfortune!

Marina Bardi destroyed her temple, and tore down her gods, leaving a black void of despondency and gloom.

Then Daniele Falcioni, collector, banker, usurer, a man whose brain teemed with projects at once practical and visionary, entered the house of the musician, scanned the premises with keen black eyes, beneath bushy gray brows, and made a proposal to purchase the property for a reasonable sum.

"No," said Marina, frowning. "We were born here, and we wish to die here."

"Very good," assented the usurer. "Should you wish for an accommodation, at any time,

I will advance a loan on the most advantageous terms."

"The Signore Falcioni may have the place when we are starved out," added Marina, in a reckless yet disdainful tone.

What did it matter? The world had grown strangely dark, cold, and weary.

At the expiration of two months, she accepted the loan, on the security of the palace.

Daniele Falcioni, returning home, sought his most private sanctuary, opened a ledger, and inscribed these words on a blank leaf, with the date: —

"The house of the musician is mine."

Then he took from a case a violin, tuned the Stradivarius with a caressing touch, and executed a prelude of Beethoven's with correctness and careful precision.

These two acts were the keynote to the man's character.

He made the entry in his book coldly, as Loredano inscribed the doom of Francesco Foscari, for the death of father and uncle, in his ledger of vengeance. The age and the motive differed. The house of the musician possessed an especial fascination for him, while

he estimated the friendless daughters with absolute indifference.

Essentially a self-made man, of Hebrew birth, pushing his way in many channels, and frequently at the expense of the need of his fellow-creatures, Falcioni represented one element of the race, extending like the polyps of a coral-reef through all grades of modern Italian civilization. His family, driven from Spain by the Inquisition two centuries earlier, had found protection under the Lion of St. Mark.

His father had been a pawnbroker, who had robbed himself to contribute to the loan in support of the patriot Manin, when church plate, the golden ornaments of women, bronze bells, and copper cooking-utensils were fused in the common cause of resistance to the Croat. In turn, he was an antiquarian and dealer in pictures; while his sons, already studying the living languages in Germany, England, and France, would, in their day, rank as bankers, men of fashion, officials of state. The profound veneration of the grandfather for the little synagogue where he had worshipped, lighted by the lamp before the

reading-desk, and the Book of the Law, was modified in Daniele Falcioni to outward respect for the gilded temple of his day; and utter scepticism or frivolity would characterize his children, — inevitable fruit of the maternal cynicism of Signora Falcioni, a harsh-featured dame, with big diamonds sparkling in her ears, much addicted to the perusal of philosophical foreign literature.

There was, in the coarse and stout warp and woof of the antiquarian's nature, a silk thread of finest susceptibility to music.

Leonardo Bardi, scattering abroad his fiery and delicate improvisations from open casement and floating gondola, had exercised a profound influence over his neighbor, without heeding or perceiving him. The violinist seldom noticed his slaves.

Daniele Falcioni would fain draw from his violin the secrets evoked by genius, prompted by all the ardor of an amateur. His short and stout fingers essayed the flexibility, and extraordinary grace of touch, characteristic of the virtuoso on the vibrating strings, in vain. A longing to possess the house, to probe the inmost secrets of Leonardo Bardi's existence,

to discover the treasures veiled from other eyes, predominated over the mere Hebrew instinct of aggrandizement. Foiled by the obstinacy of Marina Bardi, in the immediate realization of the whim, he waited, guided by the patient long-sightedness of the Italian in attaining an end: yet he made the entry in the ledger that the property was already his own. The situation of these girls was untenable.

Several years had since elapsed. The three women still continued to dwell in the home of the Bardi family. The Gothic palace was a fortress besieged by the enemy across the way, yet braving secret distress rather than surrender. Defiance of Daniele Falcioni had become the dominant sentiment in Marina Bardi's breast. In railing at him, she mocked at fate. Nor was loyal Gesualda idle. Her tongue fanned prejudice and envy to ready hatred of the prudent and parsimonious rich man among the poor and idle of the vicinity. He oppressed the orphan. A second and even a third loan had been asked of the usurer, whose coffers were so temptingly accessible. These sums were needed for the urgent payment of taxes and rates.

For the rest, Gesualda or the dwarf Pippo sought the Monte di Pietà in that Palazzo Corner della Regina, associated with the pleasure-loving Catherine Cornaro, queen of Cyprus, and better known to needy Venetians than to strangers, with such treasures of jewels, lace, pictures, and hangings, as the interior could boast.

Frugality did not dismay the household. The coffee of the morning, the soup of artichokes or shell-fish, and *polenta*, of noonday, the bread and fruit of evening, with a rare flask of wine, sufficed for their simple wants.

On the morning after the parish *festa*, the sisters were seated in their nook of garden.

Screened by a high boundary wall from the canal, the garden, like the house, had suffered from neglect and decay, yet retained some traces of former splendor. The spreading pomegranate-tree still blossomed; the broken urns held richly colored plants, with veined and mottled leaves, relic of the Eastern exotics once cultivated with care; the fragments of marble capital and cornice, inserted in the brickwork, indicated earlier decoration; while the table of worn and furrowed stone remained,

where a noble company may have feasted, sung, and laughed on summer evenings centuries ago, and the Signora Bardi entertained her friends. Now the lizards held undisputed sway among the slimy stones; and white, fleshy, and hairy creatures of the spider tribe ran along the walls.

“Listen! He was like the St. George of the picture, when he slays the dragon of Evil,” said Bianca, leaning a dimpled elbow on the table, and plucking a ripe fig from the store of fruit and vegetables just brought by Gesualda. “He struck down the flaming wreath, and saved me. Madonna! How frightened I was!” added the girl, with a shuddering movement of plump shoulders.

Gesualda nodded as she drew a black gourd from the depths of her basket.

“Yes, he was a fine young man,” she admitted, with the moderation of mature years.

Marina checked a yawn, and a peculiar smile flitted over her features.

At this moment the dwarf Pippo appeared. He made a hurried salutation to Marina and Bianca, and announced brusquely:—

“I have brought you a tenant. He waits

to be shown the rooms. Eh! It is a chance that does not fall to one's lot every day. He is an artist, and a stranger."

This unexpected announcement surprised Marina, and stupefied Gesualda, while Bianca continued to eat the fig with the indolent grace inherited from her mother. Gesualda first recovered breath.

"Go along to the *gobbo* of the Rialto with your tenants," she scoffed. "We have not asked you to bring us lodgers, have we? What impertinence!"

"True," assented Pippo, with his most sly look. "The usurer Daniele Falcioni would give me a *mancia* for as much as mentioning his second floor to an artist, but I have remembered these ladies first. How long is the upper story to be left to the rats and the mice?"

Marina's eyes sought the floor sullenly, for a moment; then she rose from her seat, and replied,

"The *gobbo* is right. Show the rooms to the stranger, Gesualda."

Gerard Grootz waited in the damp and narrow court.

Gesualda bustled forth, closely followed by the dwarf, sought and found a rusty key, and led the way to the upper landing.

The trio had gained the threshold of Leonardo Bardi's private apartment, and the key had been inserted in the lock, when a rustling of garments and rush of flying feet became audible behind them on the stair, and Marina Bardi, with one bound, placed herself between them and the closed portal. A perfume, subtle and powerful, as of Oriental amber and roses mingled, shed from her black tresses and raiment, intoxicated the senses of the young artist, as her vivid personality had smitten upon brain and eye in the church.

"No, no!" she gasped, with her hand on the key. "We have no right to enter here. It is a mistake."

Her agitation checked the voluble chatter of Gesualda, and Pippo's quirky responses. The latter smiled in a satirical fashion, revealing his teeth.

"Very good. We have been wrong to come, it seems. We will seek the Falcioni instead."

Marina frowned, and bit her lip.

“As you please,” she said dryly.

The dwarf turned the matter over in his mind, and, quick to arrive at results, added, —

“The light may be better over yonder.”

Marina twisted the key, and flung open the door with a gesture, menacing, yet full of dignity.

“Will the *signore* enter?” she said, her thoughtful glance scanning the features of Gerard Grootz, as if for confirmation of hopes or fears.

His candid and youthful face seemed to reassure her. The dwarf pressed in after his companions, with lively curiosity betrayed by every look and gesture.

Here was the sanctum of the musician, where he had been found dead. The spot was shrouded in mystery. Not even Daniele Falcioni had ever been permitted to enter. The room was the long central hall of such buildings, with chambers opening out of it on either side. The floor was composed of polished tiles, the ceiling formed of dark beams, while the large windows, with five lights, opened on a balcony similar to the one below.

On the wall, in the rear of the chamber,

was a large and faded picture representing the two female figures, Venice and Liguria, holding shields with their respective arms, and guarding Italy between them, a third graceful goddess, with the stork as a symbol of unity.

Other pictures abounded in the place. Dim and blackened canvases delineated the tournaments of the carnival in the Piazza of San Marco, a tumultuous movement of fantastic shapes, masks, clowns, wizards, and columbines, like the confused images of dreams.

In a corner, a work representing St. Jerome kneeling with upturned face and bared breast, as if imploring pardon of the heavens for an insupportable load of sin, was framed in carved wood, and obscured by dust and mildew.

Venetian mirrors reflected the red hangings, the sombre pictures, the mute instruments of music, and statues of Moors with gilded tunics and turbans, supporting crystal candelabra, with a cold, even ghastly glimmer, as if the light of day had been excluded too long to warm and re-animate these relics of past luxury.

The caprice of Leonardo Bardi, fitful and easily diverted to other matters, to form here a museum of musical instruments, was apparent in the collection grouped together in the middle of the room. An organ and a harp, a quaint spinet, a gravicembalo and a clavicembalo, adorned with painted landscapes, had each some historical value; while lute, rebek, cithern, horn, and viol di gamba, possessed personal association.

“The *signore* would have here a good light for painting,” said the dwarf, with a pompous manner. “The window faces the north.”

The young girl Bianca, half afraid to explore the third story, had followed timidly, drawn by curiosity.

Her eyes met those of Gerard Grootz, and a swift flush overspread her cheek.

“He is the St. George of the church,” she whispered in the ear of Marina, with a dimpling smile. “Who knows but he has come to deliver us from the dragon?”

Pippo the dwarf, noting the warm glow of radiant loveliness on the face of Bianca, and the slender yet supple form of the artist, with those two guardian shapes, the elder sister

and nurse, in the background, was moved in his own soul, which was not unlike the depths of well in the palace court.

As for Gerard, he glanced from Marina and Bianca, striving to frame, in the words of an untried language, a very natural objection to possession of the premises, which had occurred to his mind, and in which he divined the cause of the former's reluctance and indecision.

"Shall I not disturb the gentleman too much by living here?" he inquired; and his eyes sought involuntarily the closed doors on each side of the vast room, as if anticipating that some person, hitherto invisible, would emerge.

"What gentleman?" retorted Marina, bending an imperious look upon him.

"The person I saw at the window from the *osteria* yonder," said Gerard, surprised.

"When?" insisted Marina, with increasing sharpness.

"Three nights ago," replied the artist, after a moment of reflection.

An expression of rage, bitter and intense, disfigured the features of Leonardo Bardi's eldest daughter.

“You see!” she exclaimed in scornful accents, and confronting her family. “He has been here in spite of every precaution. What are keys to a fox like Daniele Falcione? Who can tell how many times he has come?”

Gesualda and Bianca were silent.

“I believe you!” echoed Pippo, with a dry laugh, and rubbing his hands together as if he enjoyed adding fuel to her wrath.

Marina glanced beyond the casement down into the little *campo*. The next moment she seized the wrist of Gerard Grootz with fingers delicate, yet as strong as steel.

“Look! Look! Was he the man you saw at the window?” she hissed between her teeth.

Daniele Falcione, unconscious of the scrutiny fixed upon him, came to a flight of steps, and entered a gondola. Gerard peered over the balcony, and shook his head.

“Oh, no! That was not the man,” he rejoined quietly.

Marina’s nervous grasp on his wrist relaxed and she recoiled from his side a step.

“No?” she queried, in an altered voice.

“The person at the window was tall and

thin, with long hair, and a remarkable profile. I saw his head reflected on the wall there," continued Gerard, smiling. "May I not disturb him?"

Marina made no response.

Gerard turned towards his companions. What had happened? Each had averted their eyes from him. Gesualda made a rapid movement of crossing herself; the dwarf fumbled furtively at the charm suspended around his neck. Bianca looked bewildered, while drops of moisture were visible on the brow of Marina Bardi.

Silence had fallen on the group, momentary, chilling, as of some undefinable dread, some invisible presence. The waiting statues and tarnished mirrors seemed once more to reign absolute over the spot.

CHAPTER V.

THE ENEMY ACROSS THE WAY.

“SIGNORE! did your godfather stumble in repeating the creed when you were baptized?” inquired Gesualda of Gerard Grootz.

“I don’t know,” replied the young pilgrim abstractedly.

The very question blended strangely with the new phases of life about him, real and illusory. He had reached the beautiful Sea City of his ardent aspirations, he was his own master; and yet the *naïve* curiosity of the Venetian nurse brought back the mystery of his birth. Was it probable that he had a godfather, — the stork-child deposited on the miller’s threshold in the dawn?

Gesualda was dusting the few articles of furniture which remained in the large *sala*, now converted into a studio, with a superfluous display of neatness and zeal. In her heart the woman, vigorous, humorous, and

deeply superstitious, would not have wished to linger here alone ; but the presence of the stranger re-assured her.

“If your godfather made the slightest blunder in repeating the creed, at your baptism, you are able to see ghosts, and will be all your life,” continued Gesualda, pausing before the young man, with sparkling eyes and a coaxing smile. “Perhaps the *signore* has already seen spirits. Who knows?”

Gerard shook his head. His Northern coldness remained impassive under the kindling magnetism of her Southern fire.

“I have never seen ghosts,” he said, with a slight smile.

“Listen !” exclaimed Gesualda, with repressed excitement. “On the Vigil of All Souls, our dead quit the cemetery of San Michele yonder, and cross the water to revisit their own homes. That is well known by all Christians. They wish to come back, especially the souls that have buried treasures when alive. Well ! one who can see ghosts may look at the spirit, a shape long and white, and should draw quite near to question him, saying, ‘Go thou first.’ Then the ghost

seeks the spot in the house where he has hidden his money, points with his foot, and vanishes. Does the *signore* understand?"

Gerard looked at the speaker in silence, but the pupils of his blue eyes dilated. Gesualda compelled comprehension of her soft Venetian dialect, by her dramatic eloquence of glance and bearing, rather than the vehicle of mere speech. He *must* understand! He *should* understand! His silence chilled and angered her.

"There are no ghosts and haunted houses in the land where the gentleman comes from, then?" she said, with a lowering brow.

Gerard nodded.

"I have seen a haunted house, once. It was like this," he assented, sketching rapidly on paper a mansion with gable roof and chimneys visible through the trees of a neglected garden, where a bat skimmed low.

"We have no haunted houses here at Venice, praised be the Madonna and all the saints," added Gesualda quickly, and uttered a forced laugh.

"No?" echoed the artist.

"No, no!" repeated the woman with a

vehement insistence of denial; and gathering up her brooms and brushes she hastily departed, as if fearing to betray some further confidence.

Left alone, Gerard passed his hand across his brow once, and continued to ply his pencil. Gradually there formed under his touch, the gate of a Gothic palace, with a view of narrow and damp court, and stairway with carved columns and balustrade. A ghostly band crossing the canal, amidst the shifting mists of midnight, left one shape to drift up the stairway. Whither was bound the wraith, and on what fruitless quest? The house slept, darkness was merging into daybreak, and only the phantom host was abroad on the lagoons.

Gerard felt the damp chill of the court, the raw fog of the hour, as he wrought.

Surely one came, with noiseless step and bated breath, and looked over his shoulder, as he worked; but when he turned his head, no person was there.

Gerald Grootz had entered into immediate possession of his new quarters. He assured himself that had he searched through all the

crooked labyrinths of the town, he could not have found a nook more congenial to his tastes and requirements, than the upper floor of the house of the musician. To his imaginative temperament, an element of the magic of the Sea City was the ease with which such a habitation had been provided for him. The gates of the Gothic *palazzo* had opened, and he been invited to enter, as in a fairy-tale. He knew nothing of the history of Leonardo Bardi and his family; nor were the people about him, actuated by the wary reticence of the race, at all likely to enlighten him concerning any matter of which he might be ignorant.

Pippo, the dwarf, had been the insignificant instrument of the stranger's need. Pippo, maliciously disposed to thwart Daniele Falconi in finding a tenant, as much as to befriend the impoverished Bardi household, had tapped on the artist's door early in the morning, and entreated him to look at a very desirable studio in the quarter, before seeking accommodation elsewhere.

Gerard had smiled, and readily assented.

The terms adjusted, the musical instruments,

books, and furniture removed, and the installation effected, Pippo's triumph was complete.

He waited at the steps, and as the grandfather hooked the gondola of Signore Falcioni, drawing it to shore, made his most respectful obeisance to the occupant.

"The *signore* will be glad to learn that the house of the musician has to-day a new inmate," he announced with mocking affability.

"A new inmate, imp!" repeated the usurper, in a rough tone. "Explain your meaning a little more clearly."

Pippo sidled, in a wary fashion, beyond the reach of the large man's cane.

"As to that, I advised the ladies to rent the upper floor to an artist, for a studio," continued the dwarf. "*Diamine!* They are not overburdened with money, those beautiful girls."

Ever ready to flout and tease, and add the spark requisite to ignite the gunpowder of anger, Pippo was scarcely prepared for the result of his communication.

Daniele Falcioni grew yellow with rage, the nostrils of his large aquiline nose dilated, and his shaggy brows met over his piercing eyes

in a menacing frown. He clutched his cane, and lifted it instinctively, as if about to strike his little tormentor to the earth, then repressed his irritation by an effort, crossed the *campo*, and entered his own door in silence.

Such was the prank, the sly revenge of Pippo, the dwarf, on the rich antiquarian. The matter partook of the nature of a *burla*, a jest, rather than a more serious revenge.

The tale circulated through the quarter, of how Pippo had repaid the usurer in his own coin, for not giving him an alms on the parish *fiesta*, occasioning general merriment. *Altro!* The meanest little fly can sting. To sting, thwart, and baffle, was the dwarf's retaliation on the large, well-grown, and strong fellow-creatures about him. Pippo had landed the stranger fish into the net of the Bardi household, by his adroit cleverness, before the Falconi suspected the presence of the artist at the Inn of the Half-Moon.

The neighbors pronounced Pippo intelligent; and he was required to repeat the story at every turn, now in the wine-shop, and again at the stall of the fruiterer, or before the shrine at the corner.

Half an hour later, Daniele Falcioni once more emerged from his habitation, entered the court of the house of the musician, ascended the stairway, and, without heeding the protest of the angry Gesualda, made his way to the quarters of Gerard Grootz.

He tapped on the door, and pushed it open without permission. "Good-day," he said brusquely. He spoke in German, and glanced about the premises with ill-concealed curiosity.

"Good-day," replied Gerard, who was arranging the contents of his portfolio near the window.

The visitor selected a chair, unbidden, seated himself, and, resting his hands on the ivory knob of his cane, scrutinized the young man intently.

"What is your name?" he demanded, with the pertinacity of the Italian in questioning a stranger.

"Gerard Grootz," was the candid response.

"Ah! You come to our Venice to study color. Soon you will have this place filled with sketches of water-carriers, fishermen, and *gondolieri*. Well, well! I shall be glad to see your studies, for I collect pictures."

As he uttered these words, Falcioni stared at the dark beams of the ceiling, the tiles of the floor, and the walls.

Gerard was amused and vexed. The German tongue sounded pleasantly to his ear; and evidently this stranger might prove an art patron, such as a poor young artist should endeavor to propitiate. The physiognomy of Daniele Falcioni, sharply cut, aquiline, and hard in the lines, yet full of intelligence, did not displease him. Yes, he had come here to work.

“What is your age?” pursued the newcomer, after a pause.

“Twenty years,” said Gerard, smiling.

“So young? You have life before you. How did you know of this *palazzo*, this room?”

“Chance led me here,” rejoined Gerard.

Daniele Falcioni scanned his features anew; and, as if dissatisfied by this response, a disagreeable smile curled his lips.

“You come from Germany?” he continued, after a second pause, during which his eye had noted every object in the room.

“From Amsterdam,” corrected the painter.

The antiquarian nodded.

“A good school, but not like our Venice, with a lesson ready at every turn. Eh! I have a picture in one of the private collections of that city, I am told. The merchant is a sort of nabob in trade, and owns millions.” These last words were pronounced with Hebrew unction.

Gerard dropped his pencil, and his face glowed with sudden animation. A swift conviction darted through his mind, like lightning across a cloud.

“The merchant’s name is Jacob Van Limburg,” he said quickly. “Oh, he is the best man in the world!”

“Very possibly that is the name,” assented Falcioni calmly. “Humph! Jacob Van Limburg: I have the address written in my ledger, but my memory fails me with these foreigners. The picture went dirt cheap, all through the stupidity of that rogue of a Paris dealer, who pretended to mistake my figures. It should have brought thousands and thousands of francs more. It was a Giorgione.”

“A Venetian portrait,” supplemented Gerard, with extraordinary agitation.

“Surely! A Venetian portrait,” said Daniele Falcioni in rueful remembrance of scanty gains, according to his own standard of remuneration.

Gerard crossed the room, and seized the hands of the visitor in a nervous grasp.

“Oh, if you knew all!” he cried, emotion rendering his voice tremulous. “I have seen the portrait. They took me to look at it years ago, when I was dumb and blind. What do I care for godfathers! I was born then, in the Van Limburg gallery, before the Venetian portrait, although I came from the Rhine bank. Do you understand? Ah, tell me that you understand my meaning!”

The passionate conviction of his tone, the earnestness of his glance and attitude, were not unlike both in Gesualda at an earlier hour of the same day. As the nurse had sought, for motives of her own, to inspire Gerard with awe of the Vigil of All Souls, so he now strove to imbue Daniele Falcioni with his own enthusiasm.

Here was the man, the living instrument, who had drawn forth the Giorgione from some obscure resting-place of palace corridor, after the corroding action of sea-air and rain had

done their worst for years, to set as the jewel of a collection in a Northern land. He could have kissed the brown hands he held, and wrung in his own, with a sudden, frantic transport of joy.

Falcioni remained unmoved by the ebullition. He did not repulse the youth, but measured him with his habitual, critical scrutiny of mankind. At the moment when expediency prompted, he heated the little iron of judicious inquiry in the flame of Gerard's overflowing gratitude.

"What are you doing in this house? Why are you here at all?" The tone was dry and aggressive.

Gerard released the hands he held, and drew back a pace.

"To become like him, perhaps," he murmured, and looked at Falcioni with anxiety and humility.

His interlocutor understood, and slightly shrugged his shoulders.

"Very good. You must work to attain perfection," he admonished.

The next moment his face changed; the disagreeable smile once more curled his thin lips,

revealing long, sharp teeth, yellowed by the excessive use of tobacco.

“Bah! Confess the truth,” he added. “You wish to live under the same roof with a beautiful girl. Well! She is plump and fair enough, and her golden hair might turn older and wiser heads. Have a care that the nurse does not scratch out your eyes, my friend.”

An expression of bewilderment clouded the previous animation of the young man’s features.

“Gold hair!” he murmured helplessly. “The light is good up here.”

“Suppose you marry her, and have a brood of children?” suggested Falcioni, in a grating voice. “How will you live? These women do not own the house. They are penniless. Will Monsieur Van Limburg support you?”

Gerard did not resent the familiarity of the stranger’s tone, or the brusque insistence of his manner. The puzzled wonder of his face merged to vacancy, even chilled disappointment.

“I am to work,” he repeated simply, as if unable to follow the other’s train of reasoning.

“Good,” said the antiquarian, with a com-

plete change of bearing, and a trace of benevolence perceptible in his tone. "You shall paint me a picture. I give you the order. I can come again, and discuss the subject. Perhaps it may prove your *chef-d'œuvre*. Auguste Préault pronounced painting the daughter of love and of light, my friend."

Gerard turned slowly towards the casement. What was love? Where was the light?

In one direction the plain stretched to the verge of the Julian Alps, and the peaks of Carniola, with their summits enveloped in mists. In the other, the liquid pathway of lagoons held on its bosom Burano, crowned by an airy campanile, Torcello's square and solid tower, and Murano, veiled by a cloud of smoke from the glass-works.

As Gerard gazed on the scene, lost in contemplation of the changing lights rippling the water surface, and the drifting clouds, a funeral procession glided from the city walls in the direction of the cemetery island of San Michele. The priest's boat led, with the acolytes robed in white in the bows, holding aloft the cross, and closely followed by the funeral barge, with the bier covered by a pall

of black and gold. The prolonged, sobbing note of musical instruments smote on his ear like a knell, and he shivered.

Daniele Falcione contemplated the artist.

“A feeble stripling who may as well occupy the musician’s rooms as any other place. He will never discover the charm, the enigma of the spot, whatever it may be, as long as he can look at the sky.” Such was his mental summary of the unwelcome intruder.

Then he quitted his seat, profiting by Gerald’s abstraction, or wholly indifferent to the young man’s opinion, and made a tour of the place. He tapped the wall with his cane here and there, studied the dark picture of St. Jerome with the glance of a connoisseur and turned over several other canvases lying prone upon the floor, with marked contempt of their merit. He looked into the adjacent chambers, of which there were three on the right side, and two on the left, of the long central hall. The first was already converted into a chamber for the new lodger, whose requirements exacted no more than a bed in the middle of the floor, a chest of drawers, an iron wash-stand, and two chairs.

The other rooms were bare and cheerless.

The eye of Daniele Falcioni glistened with a certain cruel satisfaction at these manifestations of distress in the garrison he was besieging. The house had been gradually stripped of rich and luxurious appointments, in order that a couple of foolish girls might retain possession of their early home, instead of relinquishing it to him at a reasonable price. They must pay the penalty of their obstinacy.

He crossed the *sala*, with another glance at the unconscious artist, and entered the first chamber on the left.

The articles removed from the *sala* had been hastily collected here, the musical instruments placed in the centre, with the chest against the wall, and the books scattered about.

The intruder paused, and emotion was perceptible on his features. He made an instinctive movement as if about to uncover his head. One would have said he breathed some subtle perfume, exciting and intoxicating, in this atmosphere of a vanished greatness, where all bespoke dust, mildew, and decay to more obtuse faculties.

On a table, a fragment of amber silk covered a small object. He lifted the silk, and discovered a glass case, which enclosed an old and worn violin. It was the favorite Stradivarius of Leonardo Bardi.

Falcioni contemplated the violin with pain, fascination, and helpless rage. He was the amateur worshipping the proficiency of the professional; the dumb quadruped watching from the earth the soaring flight of the lark towards the heavens. He was the clay, dull and inanimate, and the violinist the soul-flame, spurning the flesh.

Some faint vibration of sound permeated the chamber. Was it the jar of movement elsewhere in the house? Did one of the cords of the spinet or harp snap, as he listened intently for echo, or actual speech with the dead?

The funeral procession passed, and disappeared beyond the cypress-trees and high brick wall of the cemetery.

Gerard Grootz awoke from his revery with a start. A stranger had come into the studio, who might prove to be an art patron. He turned, and discovered that Daniele Fal-

cioni was no longer seated, leaning on his cane, but had entered the chamber on the left.

Wholly devoid of curiosity, yet a trifle puzzled, Gerard followed the visitor.

Falcioni still held the silk cover in his hand, and was gazing reverentially at the violin in the glass case, as one looks on the dead.

“His Stradivarius,” he explained to the wondering artist, speaking in a lowered tone, strangely at variance with his usual sharp and metallic qualities of voice. “To hear him play was to have your soul drawn out of the body. He could do with you as he willed, had he but known it.”

Gerard stooped, and picked up a sheet of paper, dislodged by the removal of the silk cover. The page, detached from a music-book, had an engraving above the title of a fantasia, of Leonardo Bardi playing on his famous violin.

“Who is he?” inquired Gerard.

“Leonardo Bardi, the father of these girls, and the greatest virtuoso who ever breathed,” replied the antiquarian, with unwonted enthusiasm.

“He lived here? Where is he now?”
pursued Gerard slowly.

Falcioni looked at him with keen interrogation a moment, and replaced the silk cover over the glass case.

“He is dead,” he replied after a pause.

Gerard recognized the face he had seen at the window of the Gothic palace on the Eve of All Souls.

CHAPTER VI.

TWO SISTERS.

“DANIELE FALCIONI is our enemy. He will yet ruin us. *Ebbene!* All must take their chances of good and evil in this world. If the *signore* consorts with the usurer, he is a traitor in the house,” said Marina Bardi.

“I am not a traitor in the house,” replied Gerard Grootz, with unusual animation.

“What did he wish, the Falcioni?” pursued Marina, after a pause.

“To order a picture of me,” said the artist simply. “I chose the early Venetian, sun-bronzed and vigorous, on the sands of Malamocco, with his hut in the background, amidst the poppies and rushes, dipping the first sail into yellow dye. Such a fisherman is of the Giorgione type. Then I thought of a woman, as I first saw her in a church, instead. It does not matter. The Signore Falcioni shall be refused admittance to my studio.”

The island of Sant' Elena basked in the autumn sunshine, like a flaming jewel, set in the zone of encircling lagoons.

A glory of light, pure, transparent, and ineffably dazzling, was shed abroad on the wide expanse of waters, reflecting every mood of sky above, and the peaks of distant mountains. A glory of color fed the eye in the crimson and russet tints of slopes inland, and the gleam of buildings nearer at hand. A glory of life, joyous, elastic, ecstatic, in inhaling the breeze, ready to caress in softest summer zephyr, or spring capriciously into a tempest, sweeping over from the Istrian and Dalmatian coast, stirred the pulses in tumultuous sympathy with untrammelled freedom. Over yonder :

“ You will see Venice glide as though in dreams,
Midmost a hollowed opal ; for her sky,
Mirrored upon the ocean pavement, seems
At dawn and eve, to build in vacancy
A wondrous bubble dome of wizardry,
Suspended where the light, all ways alike
Circumfluent, upon her sphere may strike.”

At that date, Sant' Elena was still the holiday ground of excursionists, and unmarred by

modern enterprise. The walls of the convent glowed in a mellow warmth through the thinning foliage; and the roses twined about the slender shafts and spandrels of the hushed cloister, while ferns and mosses clung to the ledges and niches of dormitory, lavatory, and refectory door and embrasure.

In the shadow of the cypress and sycamore trees, sat Marina Bardi. Bianca gathered flowers in the greensward, or watched the little crabs scuttle about in the water near the shore; a pastime shared by Gesualda with childish glee.

The sunshine permeated the frame of the young artist, even as the wind lifted the fair hair from his brow; or was it that on the previous stillness and coldness of his silent boyhood, he was conscious of the thrilling awakening to a new existence of sensibilities unsuspected because dormant, like the gathering volume of the tide now flowing in from the sea? The companionship of these Venetians during the tranquil afternoon hours, on the tiny island, steeped in the rich warmth of the waning summer, and surrounded by the sweep of glittering waters, intoxicated the senses.

His tongue loosened by instinct of the heart, rather than effort of brain and will, followed their flow of speech, and unconsciously caught, in imitation, each shade of inflection.

He had disclaimed being a traitor in the house, and professed entire willingness to banish the art patron, Daniele Falcioni, at their bidding, with a gallantry worthy of a more mature and experienced man.

The sisters, aided by Gesualda, had spread the net of soft cajolery for his unwary feet, their manner silken and gentle, and captured a willing victim. Neither frowns nor reproaches had fallen to his portion after the visit of Danieli Falcioni to the studio. Instead, he had been invited to come abroad in the sunny hours of matchless weather, and drift over the silvery lagoons, threading the tangled wealth of weed and reef about fairy islets dreaming over their own reflections of tower and balcony in the water mirror.

Then Marina Bardi, hitherto gentle and languid of speech and movement, had unsheathed her little feminine weapon of defiance and hatred of the usurer swiftly, suddenly; and Gerard had yielded a half-startled acqui-

escence to her wishes. How could he do otherwise?

Marina sat in the shadow of the cypress-trees, and a vine, vivid scarlet with the changing leaf, swayed across the dilapidated wall above her head. The outline of her form, supple and graceful, was revealed to advantage by her robe, in which blended the varying tints of green and purple, dear to the Venetian. Her black hair, drawn low across the forehead, was coiled in a luxuriant mass at the back of the head, and decked with several crimson roses whose petals fell on her shoulder from time to time. The beauty of delicate eyebrows, a mouth full, tender, and passionate, even in repression, and a nose slightly aquiline, was enhanced by the dreamy tranquillity of her mood, the hour, the spot.

The day seemed to shed a mellow radiance over her listless figure, deepen the shadowy meaning ever slumbering in the depths of her dark eyes, and linger on the finely moulded arm, wrist, and hand, as her restless fingers plucked apart the roses heaped in her lap by Bianca, scattering them slowly on the ground.

She accepted Gerard's sacrifice with a smile

transient and mocking, and a glance full in his face which conveyed her gratitude in one blinding flash of intelligence, then lapsed into her former abstraction. She might have been meditating on the tombs of the Giustiniani and the Loredano near by, or the relics of that more majestic shade of history Saint Helena.

Bianca's voice, fresh, silver, and caressing, was never silent; and Bianca's laughter, as sweet as the note of a bird, brought even a responsive smile to the withered visage of an aged sacristan. Why should not one laugh and sing on such a day? How could one help laughing and singing? Everybody could not be expected to sigh, weep, and lament, when the world is so gay and beautiful! The little wavelets glittered, and made soft cooing murmurs to Bianca's ear; the lizards came out of their nooks to gaze at her. And Bianca was worthy of a glance. Her sixteen years asserted a right to be admired, by a subtile play of new-born coquetry in the presence of the stranger youth Gerard Grootz. Her slender form was clad in red, and she had thrust roses also, into the masses of her blonde tresses, behind one delicately curved ear; colors which

contrasted vividly with the fairness of her skin, rounded throat, and dimpled chin. Laughter lurked beneath the full and veined lids of her soft eyes, now raised towards Gerard in arch questionings, and again modestly lowered, while the rosy lips parted to reveal small white teeth.

Gesualda, inhaling the salt breath of her native air with full lungs, regarded her nursing with pride and intuitive uneasiness, as guardian of the pretty and flighty blonde head.

A good and docile child was Bianca, and not subject to black moods of irritability like the unhappy Marina. Gesualda's youngest foster-child had been reared as a true Venetian should be, on such spiritual fare as the "*Dottrina Cristiana*," and with a good memory and nice appreciation of saints' festivals as marked by the eating of chestnuts on St. Martin's Day, or beans at All Souls', or an almond-cake at Christmas, in the routine of the year.

Had not Bianca received a book and a medal as a child, for her part in the *disputa* of the parish church, which was all hung with crimson cloth and garlands for the ceremony, when three tiny creatures attired in blue, the color

of the Madonna, had gone in the midst of the juvenile band, wearing black-and-white veils, to recite the catechism in a manner so marvellous as to move all hearts?

Not that Leonardo Bardi, unnatural parent, cared. Not he! Bianca had been served with her feast of buns, *paste-dolci*, and Cyprus wine, afterwards, notwithstanding; thanks to her faithful Gesualda.

What young girl knew better the legends of saints and miracles, with which the Sea City abounds, than Bianca? The chances were that she still firmly believed in the angels of the house, who carry up to heaven each sixty minutes its actions to be judged, and the children may hear the rustle of invisible wings. Madonna! How well she told, the little one, about the Doge Giacomo Tiepolo when he dreamed of seeing the ground all covered with roses, where doves flew about, having gold crosses on their heads, and angels descending from the sky, swaying golden censers, on the spot where he was clearly to found a convent and church!

What a pleasure it was to hear Bianca describe the banquet served in the *sala* of the

Council of Ten for the French king, when every article was made of sugar, from the tablecloth and napkin to the plate of the prince, representing a queen seated on two tigers! That was like a fairy-tale; and one might eat all, even to the knives and forks!

Here was a young man come to trouble still more a harassed household. What manner of man was he? Soft, tractable, and innocent enough in appearance, Gesualda reasoned, yet how could one be assured of any thing? She gave him one of those looks, keen, suspicious, and thoughtful, so often discernible on the features of Italian maturity. Then she took up the thread of conversation where it had dropped, with the brusque familiarity peculiar to her.

“As to that, one must live. If an artist paints pictures, he should sell them. Daniele Falcioni may need to be handled with a silken glove. Who knows?”

Gesualda sighed, seated on the grass, where she resembled a great variegated blossom, in a gown of yellow, russet, and brown.

Marina moved with an impatient gesture, as if the suggestion wounded her.

“I can find another patron,” retorted Gerard lightly, and suffered Bianca to lead him away to learn the names of different plants and flowers.

Never was instructress more bewitching, or pupil more docile. Gerard must inhale the fragrance of certain leaves as tendered by a hand, plump, white as milk, and symmetrical, with a rosy palm. Gerard must carefully repeat a musical rhyme affirming that here the pomegranate blossoms glowed like fire in the month of July; and the blithe teacher blushed like the flower she praised, and broke into merry laughter.

The pair paused to gather a plume of fern in an angle of the wall.

“Next year we must seek the violets here,” said Bianca, drawing the fern-frond across her cheek musingly.

“Yes; next year,” assented Gerard, in a still more dreamy tone.

The sunset hour had come, warming the tranquil waters to saffron and pink hues. The deep red of the brick of San Giorgio Maggiore glowed in the warm light; and beyond, the dome of the church of Santa Maria

della Salute resembled a bulb of mother-of-pearl, about to separate from the adjacent roofs, and float away seawards.

A market-boat, piled high with golden pumpkins, tomatoes, and figs, drifted slowly past. The barges, laden with sweet water from the mainland for the wells of the city, at an earlier hour, were steering a homeward course. A raft of Tyrolese lumber, having the huts of the crew built on the fragrant logs, crept towards its destination the quay.

A languor of summer sunshine steeped the senses, in the waning year, even as the splendor of perishing glories lingered about canal and piazza of the city.

Gesualda reminded Gerard and Bianca of the lateness of the hour, in somewhat dry fashion.

“Oh, do not return home yet!” cried Bianca, as they entered the gondola. “Let us go far, far out on the waters, sister mine. Soon the moon will rise.”

The gayety of the young girl infected her companions, and put fresh vigor into the stalwart arm of the *gondoliere*. The light craft skimmed along the channel marked by the

piles, and loitered about the islands, until day had waned, twilight deepened, and the moon rose in a clear sky, shedding afar the silvery rays of her triumphant progress.

The moments passed softly, imperceptibly, as the ripples ebbed and flowed on the sedgy shore skirted by the gondola. Gradually the laughter of Bianca and the loquacity of Gesualda sank to half-murmured song, with intervals of silence, or the *gondoliere*, bending to his oar with rapid stroke, took up the refrain. Peace was shed down from the serene depths of heaven, and brooded over the whispering waters.

Suddenly another gondola appeared, sped forward, and came into sharp collision with the idly drifting boat. Both craft rocked in the perilous contact, swerved, and separated, with mutual recriminations on the part of the *gondoliere*.

The occupants of the second gondola scarcely heeded the accident. A man, young, handsome, and impassioned, and a woman, pensive, tender, receptive, were floating in the moon's track, absorbed in each other, and oblivious of the rest of the world. It was a

vision of earthly happiness, a flash, clearly perceptible to Gerard and his companions, yet lost as soon as found.

Marina Bardi sprang to her feet with a half-articulate cry, and stretched forth her hands towards the fast-receding boat.

“Enrico!” she exclaimed, in a tone of anguish. “Enrico here in Venice again? Oh, *mio innamorato*! Who is she, then?”

A shudder of powerful emotion shook the frame of Leonardo Bardi’s unfortunate daughter. Every nerve and fibre of her body appeared to vibrate and pulsate beneath the shock of an unexpected meeting; her mobile features became convulsed with passion, and the red roses fell from her hair into the water.

Gesualda moved to her side, and took her hands.

“No, no, *carina*, you are mistaken,” she urged soothingly. “That man was not the *capitan*. This one is shorter and stouter, and quite different in many ways, I assure you. He is a foreigner speaking another language. I heard his very words, child. — Bianca, tell her it is not the officer.”

“Oh, no,” faltered Bianca. “He is more blonde.”

“You lie!” hissed Marina, transported by rage. For a moment she gazed after the rapidly vanishing gondola, her neck curved, while her head appeared to flatten like that of a snake. If the speeding bolt of jealous hatred could have killed the unconscious stranger in the other boat, the look of Marina Bardi would have thus slain a dreaded rival.

The next instant, actuated by a revulsion of despair, she made a quick and desperate effort to throw herself into the lagoon. The vigilant nurse, watching every gesture, anticipated the rash movement, and wound her strong arms around the supple form of her charge, drawing her back as much by tenacity of will as force of muscle.

“Thou shalt not do it, foolish one,” she panted.

There was a brief struggle between the two women, of which the *gondoliere* and Gerard were bewildered and paralyzed spectators, intermingled with caresses and reproaches on the part of the nurse.

At length the latter released her hold ab-

ruptly, drew herself up with menacing dignity, and said fiercely, —

“Go, then, and I will follow. We will both leave the child alone:” she pointed to Bianca.

Her words had an immediate influence. Marina turned her sombre glance on her sister mechanically, and shrank down among the cushions once more with a sigh of weariness and submission.

Gesualda, triumphant, wisely held her peace, after giving a brief direction to the *gondoliere* to turn homeward.

In the mean while, Bianca had nestled close to Gerard’s side, trembling with terror. Her hair brushed the neck of the young man as she whispered in his ear, —

“Marina imagines she sees her lover in every stranger. Oh, it is terrible! He was faithless, you know.”

Gerard put his arm about the girl, and drew her nearer to him, with an instinct of protection. Bianca was so young, ignorant, and confiding, that her very innocence touched him. In the swift change of mood which had come over Marina, he felt confused and help-

less, and obeyed the impulse only of shielding the younger sister from a conflict which he did not fully comprehend. "Eh! It is best not to meddle with a madwoman," muttered the *gondoliere*, and maintained a conservative bearing towards his fare.

Gesualda took a rosary of coral beads from her pocket, and recited prayers with an ostentatious display of piety doubtless intended as a rebuke.

The evening bells began to softly peal on the night, echoing in fitful pulsations from city to distant island.

The familiar steps gained, Marina quitted the boat heavily, guided by the faithful Gesualda.

Pippo waited with the grandfather, his bird-cage held under his arm. The parrakeets, adapting themselves to circumstances, were asleep, pressed closely together in little ruffled balls of green feathers. The dwarf smiled in his most envious and malevolent fashion, as he inspected the group of returned holiday seekers.

Bianca lingered, under pretence of returning his greeting.

“Foolish Pippo, not to come out on the lagoons,” she said, dropping him a rose.

“For that matter, *signorina*, we have had fine music on the piazza to-night,” he retorted in a surly tone.

No; he would not go on the water. He was afraid of the treacherous, gliding currents. None the less did he resent the boldness and consequent enjoyment of others. Bianca was only a silly maiden, and yet she could mock at him, for not venturing abroad in fine weather. He cast the rose on the stones, and trampled upon the flower in the darkness, as a vent to ill-humor.

The moonlight shone white and cold on the stairway and court as the party entered, and the well cast a sharp shadow across the pavement.

Bianca followed her sister and nurse with reluctance. She slipped her hand within that of Gerard, with a clinging, thrilling clasp.

“Good - night, and sweet repose,” she whispered.

“Good-night, and sweet repose,” he echoed.

They paused thus on the landing, and looked into each other's eyes with a smile.

Then Gerard ascended to the upper floor, carrying with him the perfume of flowers, the scent of ferns clinging to cloister arches and columns, the damp and briny odors of seaweed.

He could not sleep. The idyl of the island, with merry Bianca for a companion, would have brought roseate slumbers to his pillow, smile on lip. The remembrance of Marina, standing in the boat, quivering with passion, drove sleep from his eyelids, and crowded his brain with feverish images.

He rose, dressed, and went out into the studio. How vast and cold the *sala* appeared, in the prevailing obscurity ! The very pictures on the walls acquired a certain significance. The Italy of the allegorical group seemed to observe Gerard's movements with grave attention. The St. Jerome became pallid in the lamp's ray, as if surrounded by a halo.

Gerard opened the window, and stepped forth on the balcony. The moon was set, and the solemn grayness and silence of the hour pervaded earth and sky. A faint sound reached the ear of the young man, and compelled him to listen. Was it the water fretting against the steps and bridge, the soughing of

the wind, or the lament of a human voice? He could not determine, and the murmur tantalized, exasperated his nerves.

He returned to the studio, and closed the casement before lighting the candles in a brass candelabra.

Then he adjusted an easel, and began to trace the figure of a woman in a boat.

No semblance of Fortune, white-robed, in her skiff, supporting a globe against her knee, while little naked genii play about her, occurred to Gerard Grootz, as it once did to Giovanni Bellini. The restless mood of the artist found relief in work. The image of Marina Bardi, abandoned by the lover she beholds flitting past her on the lagoon, with another girl, powerless to detain or slay, and swaying in the gondola under the shock of surprise and jealousy, grew beneath his hand. Gradually, as he wrought, the shape became that of the moon, as portrayed by Egyptian sculpture, and adopted by the early Venetians. The boat acquired the curves of the crescent, and the radiance of the planet was shed in rippling folds of drapery upon the glancing waves.

Daybreak found him still absorbed in the task.

The Bardi family remained invisible on that day. Gerard did not venture to intrude on their privacy, although he had been recently included in their circle.

Gesualda, heavy-eyed, yellow, and sullen, with her gray hair in disorder, toiled up-stairs with her copper vessel brimming with water, and uttered a lugubrious sigh when saluted by the tenant. Her manner may have invited confidential questioning, but Gerard refrained from comment. He took his hat, instead, and, entering the first gondola, suffered himself to be conveyed far away from the house of the musician. He did not return until nine o'clock in the evening.

The sketch of the moon confronted him. Wearied yet refreshed he sought his bed.

After midnight a sound awakened him. Steps light and hesitating were audible on the tiles of the *sala*. Before he realized whether he was fully awake, or still dreamed, Gerard had sprang from his couch, and gained the threshold of his chamber, where he paused, with loudly beating heart, and

peered through the aperture of half-opened door.

Marina Bardi slowly advanced down the long room, holding an oil-lamp of classical shape in her hand.

She wore the flimsy robe of amber wool, which had caught the mists of golden sunshine in the apse of San Marco, on the afternoon when Gerard first saw her; and her black hair fell in disorder on her shoulders.

Her presence at this hour startled the spectator. His first conviction was that she moved in a somnambulistic trance, from the pallor of her cheek, and the fixed gaze of her mournful eyes. Her indecision, the unquiet glances she cast about the apartment, the start of superstition with which she looked over her shoulder at some slight noise, speedily convinced him of her wakefulness, and that she was drawn towards an object alike attractive and repellent to her. The middle of the *sala* gained, she paused, and held the lamp above her head, as if to pierce the shadows, and like a soul in doubt.

Gerard held his breath, while a cold shudder of fear swept over him. Why was she

there? What was she about to do? The same sense of powerlessness to avert impending and invisible evil, which he had experienced in the gondola, again overwhelmed the faculties of the spectator.

After a pause of interminable duration to Gerard, Marina turned slowly, and entered the room containing the collection of her father.

Gerard groped for his clothes in a panic of haste. He must see what she was doing in that chamber. Chains, such as the Ten once forged for their prisoners, could not have held him at the moment. The impulse to go to her seized and shook him like a tempest. Surely there was some frenzy of madness abroad in the stillness of the Venetian night.

Marina gazed about her absently, as if striving to collect her own thoughts, and placed her lamp on the desk. Her next step was to raise the lid of the chest, and search amidst the *débris* of contents until she found a volume bound in faded morocco, and fastened with gilt clasps. She lifted the book on the desk, opened it, and traced the lines with her finger, as she read.

Slips of paper twisted into odd shapes, morsels of ribbon, and dried flowers fluttered unheeded to the floor, as she scanned the contents with a feverish eagerness of manner.

At the head of the page was inscribed the name of Leonardo Bardi, and a date of twenty years before.

Marina uttered a stifled exclamation. The musician had been married a few months when he wrote these words: —

“Life is an intolerable weariness, at times. Why live?”

The characters were faded, and the sheets stained with mildew; yet the words exercised over the mind of the tardy reader a fatal spell of fascination.

Gesualda had discovered the book in the chest when the articles were removed to convert the *sala* into a studio. Mistress and servant had pored over the contents in hopes of discovering some clew to the last wishes of the violinist; but in vain, for the volume had evidently been used long ago, and subsequently forgotten.

Bars of music as *bizarre* and weird as the brain of the composer, and heads, sketched

with a pen, of imps and goblins, formed a margin for the written thought.

Now Marina returned, lured by the remembrance of a line which had recurred to her memory with peculiar vividness, afterward.

She continued with parted lips, and dilating eyes : —

“Pliny asserts that man has the power of flying to the tomb, since the earth is filled with herbs by means of which the weary may find a rapid and painless death. Ovid, on the contrary, urged that in extreme distress it is easy to despise life, and that true courage consists in enduring it.”

Marina turned another leaf, and forgetting herself in these speculations, murmured aloud :

“Seneca says, ‘To death alone it is due, that life is not a punishment, and erect, beneath the frowns of fortune, I can preserve my mind unshaken, and master of itself. I have one to whom I can appeal. I see the rack, the scourge, the instruments of torture adapted to every limb and every nerve ; but I also see Death. She stands beyond my savage enemies. Slavery loses its bitterness when by a step I can pass to liberty. Against all

the injuries of life, I have the refuge of death. Wherever I look, there is the end of evils. You see that yawning precipice: there you may descend to liberty. You see that river, that sea, that well: liberty sits at the bottom. Do you seek the way to freedom? You may find it in every vein of your body.' ”

The reader's voice sank to a whisper.

In the chamber, the harp and the organ loomed as strange and ghostly shapes in the obscurity, while the light of the oil-lamp fell full on Marina's face and hair.

Gerard Grootz approached her quietly. An unwonted fire burned in the depths of his blue eyes, and his features betrayed powerful emotion.

Marina turned, and looked at him in silence. She evinced no surprise at his presence.

“Live!” murmured the young man, with dry and trembling lips. “Life is beautiful, and only death is repulsive, hideous.”

He extended his hand, and touched her inert fingers, her arm, her shoulder, as if desirous to assure himself of her tangible reality.

Marina's face softened; and in her dark eyes surprise, doubt, sudden hope, gleamed.

"I am the woman of whom you dream for your first picture?" she questioned, half imperiously, half tenderly; and her gaze continued to search his face.

"Yes," he murmured. "I saw you in the church of San Marco on the day of my arrival. You wore this robe, and the light made it shine like pure gold."

Marina bent her head in assent, with a thoughtful expression.

"True. I was there for Bianca to pray. I do not pray now. You understand? The Madonna and the saints have forgotten me."

"Live!" repeated Gerard Grootz.

All else had vanished save that head of lustrous black hair, and those eyes looking into his troubled soul, from beneath the low smooth brow. In the charm of her presence, with the perfume of the amber and roses enveloping him, Gerard was ready to drink of any poisoned chalice she might press to his lips.

Gesualda, suspicious and angry in appearance, entered the room.

"Is it not enough for a woman of my years, to slave all day in the service of the family,

without being forced to play the part of sentinel at night, as well?" she grumbled.

Her piercing glance turned from Gerard to the book on the desk.

"There is no good in this thing," she added, in a cross tone. "See! I have turned every page, and not found as much as a rag of paper money, Austrian, Russian, or English, such as the master used more than once to light his cigar."

Marina smiled.

"Poor Gesualda! The written words are nothing to thee," she replied gently.

"What does she mean?" cried the nurse, peering at Gerard.

The latter uttered a sigh, like one awakening from profound sleep, and passed his hand across his brow. "Put the book away," he entreated, after a pause.

Marina closed and clasped the volume, then, moved by a sudden impulse, turned and gave it into the charge of the artist.

"Keep it," she said softly. "Poor father! The book is an evil thing, a snake to bite, a scorpion to sting. There! Take it away out of my sight forever, *amico mio*!"

CHAPTER VII.

LOVE.

BIANCA, wearing a little *fichu* of blue silk knotted coquettishly about her shoulders, opened a window overlooking the court, and leaned in the embrasure, feeding her sole playmate, a tame pigeon.

True Venetian, the young girl cared for no other pets than birds, and would have delighted in the possession of an aviary, where in an atmosphere redolent of light, warmth, and flowers, tropical songsters spread their rainbow of plumage in airy motion of flight.

The house was dull, Gesualda surly, and Marina sunk in one of her moods of profound melancholy and despondency after the encounter with a handsome gentleman who resembled her lover. Bianca was dissatisfied, herself. Why should they not go out on the water every day, and gather roses on the

islands? Life should have as many *festas* as penances, at least. Her nature, tractable and impressionable, rebelled against the bondage of her sister's sombre absorption.

The girl pouted, and allowed the pigeon to strut on the ledge, with inflated chest, and iridized crest gleaming emerald and purple in the sunshine.

The next moment she laughed, and began to sing softly, —

“Now blessings on Matteo's kindly art!
He's made a window after my own heart;
He has not made it me too low or high,
And so I see my love when he goes by.”

Gerard Grootz descended from the upper floor, and, emerging on the landing of the outer stairway, paused to return Bianca's smiling greeting.

The maiden with her blue *fichu*, and the sunshine resting on her fair hair, ceased to sing, gained additional color in her round cheek, and, curving her white throat with an undulation like the pigeon's, launched a magnetic glance at the young man through her long and silky eyelashes.

“Good-morning, *signore*. Ah! We have no *festa* to-day.”

“Shall we visit Sant’ Elena again?” retorted Gerard.

Bianca shook her head, and glanced over her shoulder into the gloomy interior of the house, with an expressive gesture.

The dwarf Pippo, with the cage of birds in his hand, crept into the court. The pigeon, having received the grain from his mistress, spread strong white wings, and flew up over the roof.

“Stupid little dwarf!” teased Bianca at her casement. “Why did you not go on the lagoon with us yesterday?”

Pippo removed his ragged hat, and made a low obeisance.

“I wait until the sea comes to me, dear *signorina*,” he retorted, with good-humor.

“The sea makes me also afraid, sometimes,” said Bianca, with a facile adaptation to the prejudices of the companion of the moment, which would serve as tact in the coinage of the world. “With our lagoons it is different, you know.”

Gerard lingered on the step contemplating

the girl, whose youth and brightness brought back a glow of warmth to his fatigued senses, and banished the painful impressions of the previous night.

Marina Bardi in her yellow robe, and with loosened hair, glowing with a beauty mysterious, baleful, terrible, in the very utterance of her own dark thoughts, even as her lamp lighted the heavy shadows shrouding the chamber of the dead musician, faded before the image of Bianca, joyous, petulant, with the down of childhood still lingering on her features, basking in the full light of morning.

The artist inhaled the fragrance of this presence, as it were, dispelling phantoms of evil; and his own brow cleared, his mouth grew tender, his eye moist.

Bianca leaned from the window, drawn by some subtle movement of sympathy, while Gerard continued to gaze up at her.

Down below in the court, the dwarf Pippo scrutinized both, with an odd expression of gravity, and round unwinking eyes.

“One laughs, and another hurls herself into the depths of this well, all for love,” mused the tiny philosopher, tapping the carved lid

with his finger. "Women are strange creatures."

"Where are you going?" inquired Bianca, in a low tone.

"To tell the usurer that I cannot execute his order," replied Gerard. "He has been here again when I was out."

Another casement had opened during this colloquy, and Marina Bardi interposed.

"I was wrong to thwart you yesterday. Go to Daniele Falcioni, and tell him, instead, that you will paint him a picture. Stay! Ask him if the work shall be my portrait, taken in a costume of your own selection."

Her tone was soft, deliberate, and persuasive.

Fresh from a bath, and the cares of the toilet, her hair was arranged in lustrous coils secured with gilded pins, while her olive skin had the polish of alabaster, tending to bloom on cheek and lip. There was something feline in the placid tranquillity of her slumberous eyes, as of certain creatures beautiful, terrible, and fierce, basking in warmth and contentment.

Pippo uttered a subdued exclamation.

"The devil! Two girls and one lover.

Something will come of that. We shall see. All in good time, we shall see!"

He imparted this confidence to his tiny slaves, the parrakeets, and crept away to indulge in a fit of mad hilarity on the steps. During the day, he was subject to these lapses into prolonged laughter; but he would make no explanation of the secret source of his amusement, to the grandfather. The grandfather was full of garrulous curiosity, but his hearing was no longer acute, and his senses keen to perception.

The old *ganzero* was not to be trusted with an idea which appealed irresistibly to the crooked and malicious nature of his grandchild. Therefore Pippo hugged himself, from time to time, with prolonged chuckling, or whispered marvellous conjectures to his feathered pets. The parrakeets cocked their heads on one side, as if they fully comprehended his meaning.

"We shall see, Niccolo *mio*," he repeated, smoothing the bird's crest, as it perched on his finger.

"*Corpo di Bacco!* I was born straight, and with good legs, little one," mumbled the

grandfather, suspicious of youthful superciliousness in this reticence, and never losing an occasion to reproach the dwarf for his deformity, with a cruelty inherent in the race.

Gerard sought Daniele Falcioni. He was amazed and delighted at this whimsical change of purpose in Marina Bardi.

He found the collector in his treasure-house, in an alcove stocked with Murano ware. The shimmer of molten gems, the graceful forms of flowers, the pellucid tints of sea-water as it ripples over coral-reefs and tropical sands, mingled in the chandeliers of the ceiling, the mirrors of the walls, the dishes, standards, and chalice cups of table and bracket.

Falcioni was examining some specimens of recent purchase, to verify the work of Angelo Berovien in a goblet of ruby and purple hues, and a slender blue vase wreathed with white flowers.

He held up to the light a glass of lace-work design, in which the sunshine seemed to filter through opaque threads; and a *tazza* of irregular form, with the surface broken into a

thousand sparkling cracks, as if powdered with frost.

He received Gerard somewhat dryly, and speedily learned the purpose of his visit.

“So the *signorina* consents to your painting a picture for me,” he said, with an inflection of mockery in his tone. “That is kind!”

“I am to make her portrait, if you wish,” said Gerard simply.

“Ah!” Daniele Falcioni looked at him keenly.

The artist was gazing about him at the riches of this interior, in an ecstasy of delight.

In his boyhood he had paused, in incredulous surprise, before a single chandelier in the Van Limburg gallery. Now he was surrounded by whole prisms of the crystal, fashioned into every conceivable design of airy fragility, as if Falcioni were a giant playmate, and had blown these bubbles from a magic pipe.

The walls were lined with pieces of furniture, wrought by monks in the cloisters of the eighteenth century, of richly colored woods, inlaid with ivory and pearl, fragments of stamped leather, the red damask used in

palace and castle in the Middle Ages, and tapestry such as must not exceed the cost of one hundred and fifty golden ducats for a chamber in 1477.

The breastplate of a crusader, forged at Antwerp or Bruges, wherein to storm Zara, hung limp beside standards of arms, shields, and Turkish banners of frayed silk, against a chimney-piece carved with elaborate designs of Sirens and Cupids.

Illuminated missals, parchments, specimens of early printing, when Aldus abandoned the massive folio for the ubiquitous octavo, vases, trinkets of enamel, coral, amber, and porcelain, bewildered yet attracted the eye on every side by their profusion and variety.

An ebony table on the right held several cases of coins, dating from the *denari imperiali* of Ludovico and Lothair of 814 to the silver ducat of 1561.

On the left a similar stand of *niello*-work supported several chess-boards of great elegance, with pawns of gold and rock crystal.

Daniele Falcioni's shop was the net receiving all the relics of poverty, extravagance, and neglect.

“How long will you remain in that house?” he questioned, replacing the cup on the shelf.

Gerard sighed involuntarily.

“I have a year given to me for study. Afterwards I do not know.” His words were vague, and his bearing abstracted.

Falcioni reflected a moment, drew a red silk handkerchief from the pocket of his coat, and rubbed his bald forehead.

“Come! Let us select a costume for the new model,” he finally suggested, with a sarcastic smile.

He led the way through a dark and narrow passage to a room, lofty rather than spacious, and lighted from a large window on the side of the *campo*.

The furniture here was of ancient design, consisting of carved presses and chests, painted or inlaid, and chairs of walnut, covered with tarnished embroideries.

Gerard followed in silence, and watched his companion unlock the presses, revealing the contents, with artistic enthusiasm in the texture and color of sumptuous apparel, mingled with a boyish curiosity.

Daniele Falcioni was justly proud of his

hoard of Venetian costumes. He kept a jealous guard on the presses, intending to furnish a unique collection at some world's exhibition, for the glory of his native city, and in his own name.

The very act of showing these articles to Gerard was an honor which the youth failed to fully realize; while the offer to allow him to make use of them evinced a deeper motive than such mere generosity on the part of the Bardi creditor.

"Shall our young lady *pose* as a Dogaressa?" mocked Falcioni, adjusting on a lay figure a robe of gold brocade, trimmed with fur. "She must wear the Phrygian cap, enclosing the ducal crown, strings of pearls around the neck, and a gold chain, starred with jewels, wrought by the goldsmiths of Rialto. Do not forget that she carries a little flag in her hand."

"How magnificent!" murmured Gerard, touching the fabric reverentially.

"Well! How do you like our noble damsel thus tricked out, even in imagination?" pursued Falcioni, speaking impatiently, even contemptuously, as if the farce were commencing to weary him.

Gerard shook his head.

“No? Perhaps you prefer her as a bride, my friend. Ah, ha!”

The collector threw over the lay figure a costume of white silk, with open sleeves reaching to the ground, and breast decked with lace and jewels.

Gerard again made a negative movement.

Rose-colored velvet wrought with pearls, and a double robe of crimson stuff with collar and sleeves of woven golden thread, met with no better success.

Falcioni waxed ironical, and a trifle puzzled.

“This is the apparel of Venetian brides long dead, young gentleman,” he said, in voluble German. “I pray you to reconsider a too hasty judgment against the finery. Look! Here is the costume of a youth of the noble company of the *Calze*, striped, and puffed with satin. You may wear it, and dance attendance on your *innamorata*.”

Gerard did not smile, and remained silent. This taciturnity finished by irritating Daniele Falcioni. “The lad is a fool,” he said to himself, with the biting wisdom of maturity.

He approached Gerard, laid a hand on either shoulder, and shook him slightly.

“These dresses are not fine enough for the *signorina*, eh?”

“Fine enough?” echoed Gerard in bewilderment. “Oh, they are marvellous, incredible! Where are now the looms that wove them, and the dyes that colored them? For her? No, no! Let me choose.”

The unconscious audacity of the painter moved the antiquarian to a keen sense of humor and astonishment. He remained passive, while Gerard sought and found what he required among the stuffs.

“Take them,” said Falcioni; and Gerard departed joyfully, carrying the draperies in his arms.

Left alone, Falcioni became thoughtful, even dissatisfied. He was assisting the foreign artist, moved by a kindly impulse of interest, and also as a means of gaining a footing in the house of the musician. Would this German youth thwart his purpose in any way? No! He did not fear him.

“I will give them three more months to yield up their rights, and not another day,”

he muttered, as he once more carefully restored the robes to the presses.

An hour later, Marina Bardi stood in the studio of Gerard Grootz as the model he craved; while Bianca and Gesualda hovered near, uttering exclamations of delight and surprise.

Marina's docility touched Gerard, while her beauty intoxicated him. She was there at his bidding, to obey his most exacting behest. She seemed to have yielded up her own will in subjection to him, after confiding the book to his keeping the other night. Her smile, sweet and tender, the velvet glance of her great eyes, the softness of her manner, deprecating and grateful, all betrayed that sudden and bewildering abandonment of self to another, in the many subtile and indirect trifles of movement and glance, calculated to appeal to and inthral a man, heart and soul. Did Gerard comprehend this supple compliance? His pulses thrilled, his gaze devoured this subject; a sentiment of elation, excitement, and inspiration, raised him above the level of former effort. With Marina Bardi posing for him, achievement should be great. Thus he

spread his waxen wings, and prepared to soar towards the sun.

This transformed Marina, attentive and encouraging to every phase of the artist's task, with lips slightly parted, and a gaze far away, full of unspoken reveries, wore an Eastern tunic embroidered with large flowers, and the heads of angels, wrought in silks. Her mantle of blue and gold was ornamented with a design of peacocks' feathers, and iridescent shades of sapphire, ruby, and emerald. On her head was a Byzantine cap, sparkling with precious stones, from whence depended a veil of Moorish gauze. In her hand she carried the lily.

The dress lent richness to the charms of the wearer, and the wearer gave dignity in every curve of her graceful shoulder and arm to the faded stuffs.

Bianca and Gesualda marvelled at the work, and the strange hues blended in the fabric. Only the brain of the painter grasped such result as this central figure dominating Nubian slaves, with mosaics on the dull gold of the background, the walls draped with Chinese tissues, the door of cedar wood embossed

with silver, and the table holding a lamp of three branches.

The moments lengthened to hours as Gerard worked, and Marina did not flinch from the fatigue of her posture. Surely time was marked by something more than the throbbing seconds, each so full of meaning, of joy, pain, and trouble, in the great *sala* of the musician. The golden sands of life were ebbing fast, fast, in the invisible glass.

Gesualda shredded beans in a copper vessel held on her knee, actuated by housewifely zeal, and glanced with mingled interest and amusement at the canvas. A gala toilet for the opera or a regatta would have been more to Gesualda's taste, such as the pretty mother once wore, than these heavy garments, with the addition of silk stockings, perfumed gloves, and bracelets. Marina knew no better than to don this rubbish. Marina had never shone at the opera.

"*Poveretta!*" sighed the nurse regretfully, and snapped a bean into the basin with philosophical resignation.

Bianca held her pigeon, now on her

shoulder, and again on her plump wrist. The girl was watchful, radiant, and a trifle wistful in the contemplation of jewelled attire, which seemed to create a gulf between her sister and herself.

At length the artist pushed aside the easel with a gesture betraying anger and disappointment, leaned his elbows on his knees, and his head on his hands.

“I can do no more,” he groaned.

“Is he ill?” whispered Bianca.

Marina detached the heavy drapery from her shoulders, which served as an imperial mantle, approached the canvas, and covered it with a cloth, carefully.

“Courage, my friend,” she said calmly. “It will look differently to-morrow. Now you must take the fresh air for an hour, and afterwards we will all sup together. Yes, even to Marco,” and she tapped the pigeon on the head, playfully.

Gerard obeyed her wearily. He passed Daniele Falcioni in another gondola on the Grand Canal without perceiving or returning his jesting greeting.

Returning to his own abode, he slowly

climbed the stairway without remembering the invitation to sup with the Bardi family.

Bianca emerged on the landing, and archly reminded him of the engagement.

The young girl played the hostess at table with innate grace of amiability. Her animation relieved the re-active mood of fatigue and defection now perceptible in both model and painter. She filled Gerard's glass with wine, and fed the pigeon with a morsel of bread held between her own white teeth.

The simple meal concluded, Bianca brought Marina's guitar, and thrust the instrument into the latter's hand.

"Sing!" exclaimed the younger sister.

Marina blushed deeply, shrank, and trembled at this unusual request; then her fingers swept over the strings, half unconsciously.

"Do you wish me to sing?" she demanded, turning to Gerard with a newly found submissiveness.

"Yes," replied the artist absently.

Singing should be as natural to her as to the nightingale in the thickets of Tuscan

gardens, he thought, in his ignorance of the sacrifice such effort must cost her.

The voice of Marina once more echoed through the long-silent rooms, pathetic, tremulous, and passionate, by turns.

“Sospira, cuore, che ragion tu hai,
Aver l'amante e no vederlo mai!
El sospirar vien dal ben volere:
Desiderar e no poder avere.”

There was in Marina's singing all the dreamy abstraction in ideal reveries, the merging of the intelligence in complete abandonment to inert idleness, and the fantastic caprice of snapping a string of the guitar, and ceasing abruptly, of the Venetian woman.

“She used to sing like that when the captain listened under the balcony,” Bianca whispered to Gerard.

She gave him a liquid glance beneath her long eyelashes. If he were lingering in the *campo*, cavalier fashion, in the moonlight, Bianca would also tune a guitar on the balcony.

Marina had risen, and put aside the in-

strument, as if overwhelmed by powerful emotion.

At this moment, Gesualda having cleared away the supper, and adjusted the lamp on the table in the act of trimming the wick, upset and extinguished it.

Sudden darkness fell on the chamber.

Then Gerard felt a gentle arm encircle his neck, and a pair of lips, warm and soft, pressed to his own. In the caress his whole nature was awakened, and his soul drawn to that other soul mingled in the ecstasy, swift and evanescent, of union.

A ray of light from the rekindled lamp penetrated the shadows. Marina Bardi stood at the casement, groping to open the sash. Bianca still sat beside Gerard, and turned to him with a smile of infantile sweetness.

"The room is too warm," murmured Marina, in stifled accents, and flung open the window, leaning out to inhale the freshness of evening.

The draught made Gesualda's flame waver, and flicker out once more.

Gerard, who had never before tasted the luxury of a woman's caress, turned to Bianca,

clasped her in his embrace, kissed her cheek and hair, and, seeking her trembling mouth with his own, responded to her first greeting with a lingering pressure.

“Say that you love me as I love you,” he breathed low.

“Ah, I love you,” responded Bianca, and her head sank on his shoulder.

Vigilant Gesualda struck another match, with angry haste; but Love had been before her. Love had entered the dark mansion, on rainbow-tinted wings, speaking for the first time, in the heart of youth, a sweet and rapturous language. Too late Gesualda returned with her lamp freshly trimmed! The nurse cast a sharp glance at the couple seated near the table, while Marina remained at the casement, as if questioning the stars concerning the problems of destiny.

Next day the same ordeal of posing as model for the artist was repeated.

Marina arrayed herself in the tunic and peacock-wrought mantle. Bianca looked at Gerard slyly and coquettishly, while playing with the pigeon. Gesualda again shredded dried vegetables into the copper basin.

At the expiration of two hours the door opened, and Daniele Falcioni entered the studio unannounced.

“Good-day,” he said curtly, to the inmates of the room.

He paused beside the easel, and inspected the study, with his hands thrust into the pockets of his rough coat.

The three women vied with each other in courteous demonstrations of welcome to their dreaded creditor. Gesualda, with a brusque good-humor no less deceptive than the suave salutation of Marina, proffered a seat; Bianca advanced to tender the chair she occupied.

One does not frown openly in the face of an enemy, in the lands of the sun.

As for Gerard, he blushed like a novice when Daniele Falcioni peered over his shoulder at his work.

The visitor shrugged his shoulders.

“Take care that the left arm is not out of drawing,” he admonished.

He looked about him, and crossed the studio to the threshold of the chamber where the musical instruments were kept. His step was deliberate, and his manner assured, as

of a man entering into possession of his own.

Marina darted a startled and wrathful glance after him ; Gesualda scowled.

“ What will you do with these things ? ” he demanded in a peremptory tone. “ I will take the violin in the case, as a pledge.”

A pallor of helpless rage overspread the features of the eldest daughter of the dead musician, at this unexpected announcement, and her nostril quivered.

“ We have not thought of parting with the Stradivarius, *signore*,” she said, with unruffled affability. “ Should we be forced to do so, the preference will be your own. Rest tranquil in the assurance of our word.”

“ I wish it now,” insisted Falcioni harshly.

He was tightening the meshes of his web. He desired to make his power felt.

The three women regarded each other with consternation.

Gerard came to their rescue. He had pushed back the easel with the same capricious dissatisfaction which had oppressed him on the previous day.

“ I should like to paint the violin before you

take it away — and the musician perhaps," he objected.

The sisters divined in this suggestion a timely prevarication of delay, and looked at their young champion with profound gratitude.

Daniele Falcioni discerned something more in the proposition. His face brightened with satisfaction:

"Good! I should prefer that sketch to your Byzantine empress. Are you familiar with the features of Leonardo Bardi? There are prints of him attached to many sheets of music, and a miniature or two, doubtless, in the family."

Gerard paced the length of the *sala* several times as if lost in thought, then paused near the window with his abstracted gaze fixed on the opposite wall.

The brightness of the day had suffered a swift change. The sun was now obscured by sweeping masses of cloud, and a cold gloom pervaded the apartment. The wind, fitful and violent, rattled the glass of the casements, as if presaging storms.

The pigeon flew from the shoulder of Bianca,

and perched on the carved frame above the dim picture of St. Jerome.

“I have seen him,” said Gerard Grootz, in a muffled voice.

“Jesu Maria!” exclaimed Gesualda, and crossed herself rapidly.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE NAIL IN THE WALL.

ONE day in the ensuing month of March, Gerard was alone in his studio, putting the finishing touches to the picture ordered by Daniele Falcioni. This study represented a man standing in an open window, and playing on a violin. The adjustment of a heavy curtain revealed the shadow of the musician on the wall.

Slow in the composition of other sketches, dilatory, irresolute, eager to try a new subject, and reluctant to attain completion, the young artist had found courage and strength in this work.

He could have earlier finished the portrait, had not the sisters united in thwarting a fulfilment which might mean such capitulation as giving up the Stradivarius of their father. Rendered singularly deficient in all practical worldly wisdom by their education, the instru-

ment acquired new value in their estimation when claimed by Daniele Falcioni. It should find a place of honor in some museum. Failing that, it would be better to send it to the Monte di Pietà than to have it fall into the clutches of the usurer.

When Falcioni departed that day, Marina Bardi had taken Gerard's head between her hands, and kissed his brow; while Gesualda bestowed a resounding rustic smack on each cheek, in token of her aproval.

Bianca had clung to his arm, exclaiming, "Ah! I told you he was the San Giorgio of the altar picture, and Daniele Falcione is the dragon."

The young man, bewildered, charmed, and flattered by the praises lavished upon him, could only promise to dally with the task.

The Bardi family had no other plans. Payment to the money-lender must be made some time, and they deferred the evil hour, — that was all. Winter had brought cloud, ice, and occasional snow. Such mats and strips of carpet as this destitute interior could boast were in active requisition. The sisters carried a *scaldino* hung on the arm by the handle, and

warmed chilled finger-tips at the coals from time to time.

Elsewhere in the town the cold was bitter, spirits depressed, and limbs benumbed: in the house of the musician, new and sweet influences were charged with electric flash of song, mirth, revery, and hidden meaning.

The young girl Bianca was the source of this change, the spring of all action. Since Gerard had avowed his love for her, the character of the childish creature had developed manifold fine instincts, alike tantalizing and delicious to a lover.

The first impulse of the artist would have been to join hands, lead the maiden to her sister, and announce, —

“We love each other. When I have worked well, and secured a position, we hope to marry.”

Bianca forbade such measures with bewitching tyranny. To confess their love would spoil all. Bianca feared the displeasure of her sister. She was confident of Marina's disapproval.

Gesualda might be told the mighty secret, with arms clasped about her neck, and ready

kisses wherewith to silence all objections and grumblings.

Waiting, with a finger on an arch rosy lip, meant the training of the pigeon to fly from the court to Gerard's balcony with a note folded under the wing every morning, chance meetings in the corridor, stolen caresses, an occasional evening at the theatre, and the seemingly artless device of placing Marina first in every thing.

No marvel that roseate day-dreams steeped the senses of the artist, clouded his brain, and unnerved his hand for steady labor.

To dazzle and surprise, then flit away laughing, had become Bianca's mission, the unfolding of the rich blossom of her womanhood. Gerard was taught that the hue of a ribbon, and its adjustment, possessed all the complicated meanings of a system of signalling in the arts of coquetry. The blue fichu tied closely around the throat signified that Marina was in a suspicious and bad humor, and that the lovers must be discreet. The knot of crimson bows on the shoulder hinted that they might all go to the booth of the marionettes in the evening, or make a turn of the

piazza, if Gerard would propose such a holiday.

At times, the youth asked himself with impatience, to what end all these subterfuges tended; and, when he attempted to reason with Bianca on the subject, her airy frivolity eluded his Northern gravity. She gave him a flower, made him repeat a verse of liquid melody from a page of Tasso, and exacted a vow never to disclose their mutual attachment until she granted him leave.

On more than one occasion, disclosure trembled on his lips, when a glance of earnest entreaty, a tragic gesture behind the back of the unconscious Marina, checked the confession.

Gesualda only lent herself to the situation after many remonstrances, and with innumerable objections. Gerard was only a poor painter, and had best think solely of his work. Bianca was a penniless girl, whose beauty would prove a snare were not her faithful old Gesualda there to warn of evil. Gradually the nurse lent ear to Bianca's castle-building; and the adroitness of her nursling in skilfully turning the most trifling and commonplace

incident to her own advantage, inspired in the breast of the elder woman amazement and respect. Gesualda, if the truth be told, also shrank from Marina's sombre verdict on love and happiness. Let events take their course. Soon the spring would come, and matters might arrange themselves.

Marina Bardi, ignorant of the conspiracy developing about her, still wore that appearance of absorption and submission which had come over her on the night when Gerard had found her reading the diary of her father.

She encouraged the young man in his art, and praised his efforts, gently chiding his petulance, and reasoning with him in moments of discouragement. She posed for him with unruffled patience, for hours, and even suggested new studies when his strength flagged. One would have inferred that she lived for the art of Gerard Grootz; while he unconsciously taxed to the utmost this devotion.

When the painter approached her to rearrange the folds of drapery, emotion was perceptible on her usually calm face, transient tenderness, sympathy, and a certain scorn.

Bianca, seated on a pile of red cushions, would smile demurely at her own thoughts.

Gesualda's swarthy countenance darkened with anxiety at such moments.

Daniele Falcioni came often, and paced the *sala* with quick and restless steps, glancing covetously at the precious violin in the case, to be assured of its safety, and noting the progress of the picture.

"Leave this house when the work is finished," he advised in his abrupt fashion.

Gerard looked at his interlocutor eagerly.

"Yes," he sighed.

"You will never accomplish any thing here," pursued Daniele Falcioni. "Bah! these women feed you on cloying sweets too much."

Gerard had grown hollow-eyed and thin in the moral struggle between opposing influences. If he was happy, he was also profoundly miserable. Marina had become the conscience urging him to the task he was incapable of fulfilling to his own satisfaction. Bianca exulted in her power to thwart progress, to arrest the uplifted brush or pencil by the interposition of her pretty blond head and charming smile. At the same time the

direct influence of the younger sister was the sunny surface ripple; and the elder, unfathomable and shadowy depths. Good and evil, love in a twofold development, swayed the youth from a passion of aspiration to ideal attainment, to dalliance over a note folded beneath the wing of the pet pigeon Marco, and fastened by a silken thread.

Happy hours, full of youthful hope, in the house of the musician, despite the frequent storm and biting cold without! Would not the light and shadow of these moments haunt Gerard Grootz, fully comprehended only in retrospection, valued only in loss, to the grave?

“Thou fill'st from the winged chalice of the soul
Thy lamp, O Memory, fire-winged to its goal.”

Checked in the immediate completion of the order given by Falcioni, by the incessant and united entreaties of the Bardi household, Gerard acquired the habit of absenting himself from the studio, and spending whole days in the galleries and churches. Here he worshipped at the shrine of the great master who had drawn him hither, striving to grasp some element of the bold and hardy strokes

so effective at a distance, the round and ample contours as of living flesh, the mellow tones of coloring, the powerful *chiaroscuro*.

Now the day had come when an irascible comment of Daniele Falcioni's had spurred the artist to finish the picture.

On this Saturday morning the weather had changed. Winter was over. The warm current of air which blew into the open casement promised the speedy advent of the *scirocco* wind, and drops of moisture gathered on the walls.

The door opened, and Marina Bardi entered.

She was pale, and her lips trembled. She fixed on Gerard a burning, intense glance.

He returned her greeting with a smile.

"You have come to give me another sitting?" he demanded, touching the violin in the picture, with a fine brush, as a final stroke of completion.

"No, not to-day," she replied slowly.

Bianca put her head in the door.

"Have you my pigeon hidden away here, *Signore Pittore*?" she inquired gayly.

"No," said Gerard, in the same light tone.

Bianca wore the blue fichu around her

throat, and indicated in addition, by a slight and expressive grimace, that the mood of her sister was a bad one.

Marina made an affectionate gesture to the young girl, with an expression of benevolence. Her eye caught at the half-completed sketches of herself hung on the walls.

“ You like my coloring, *signore* ? ” she questioned.

Gerard did not look at her. He stepped back a pace, and contemplated the canvas on the easel, instead.

“ Yes, I like your coloring,” he rejoined.

Marina’s haughty features clouded to intense bitterness, but the next moment the look passed.

She went into the chamber on the left, and emerged carrying the glass case containing the violin under her arm, as if it had been an infant. Her breathing was a trifle hurried, and a vein in her throat swelled to rigid prominence.

“ What art thou doing with our father’s violin, dearest ? Give it to Daniele Falcioni ? ” asked Bianca, puzzled, and a little overawed by Marina’s gravity of demeanor.

The latter burst into a peal of shrill laughter, but speedily recovered her composure as if by an effort of will.

“Yes, I am going to give the Stradivarius to Daniele Falcioni,” she assented, after a pause. “The picture is finished. What else can we do? Come away, little one, and leave the artist in peace.”

She departed swiftly, and without bestowing another glance on Gerard.

Bianca made a little gesture of farewell, and also disappeared.

Left alone once more, Gerard took up the various studies of Marina, troubled by her words solely as they referred to himself. What had he succeeded in obtaining? A feeble reflection of her beauty, as an image may be projected on troubled waters. She had not lingered in the studio to-day to aid him, but had bidden her sister come away, and leave him in peace. Herein lay the sharpest sting of failure possible to inflict on his egotism. Such was her unspoken verdict on his work. She had demanded to know if he liked her coloring. She was mocking at him, then?

He paced the floor with a feverish restlessness, tormented by these painful reflections; his temples throbbed; strange thrills of heat and cold shook his frame. The *scirrocco* was beginning to beat in his veins.

He threw himself down on the pile of cushions where Bianca was fond of nestling like a young cat, and covered his eyes with his hands. He remained there for a long time, inert, stupefied, almost devoid of power of thought. He never knew how long a time he lingered thus.

He was aroused by a soft whirr and flash of white wings. The pigeon had reached the balcony once more, and then made a circling flight through the *sala*, finally alighting on the carved frame of the picture of St. Jerome opposite the artist. To the sick and morbid fancy of the young man, the bird more than usual symbolized the Holy Spirit.

The next moment Gerard smiled languidly. He could discern the silken thread around the neck, which denoted a missive brought by this graceful postman. He rose and approached, holding out his hand for the pigeon to descend; but Marco, ignoring these overtures, remained

aloof, inspired by a mood of caprice not unlike the whims of his fair mistress.

The pigeon was not hungry. On the appetite of a bird hinged the events of that day in the house of the musician.

“Very good, pretty pet! I will have my letters delivered more promptly, be it understood,” said Gerard aloud, and climbed on a stool, stretching up his arm with coaxing calls.

In vain! The pigeon cocked his head, looked down with one bright eye, and did not move. Gerard descended, glanced about him somewhat helplessly, and, going to a remote corner, replenished the little cup with fresh water, and scattered pease in a saucer. This tempting display of food had been the means of instructing the pigeon to fly from Bianca’s window to the balcony of the artist.

Marco remained obdurate. Marco was not hungry.

Gérard laughed, again approached, and lifted down the picture, with the bird still seated gravely on the frame.

Scarcely had the picture descended to the floor, when Marco spread wing, and, circling below the ceiling, alighted on the large alle-

gorical work of Italy in the back of the room.

Gerard flushed with a sudden impulse of anger.

“Stay there, then, silly bird!” he exclaimed. “Thou shalt not escape me, however, for I will shut the window, and hold thee prisoner.”

He closed the sash, and then began to examine the old picture, in order to slight the pigeon, and assure the feathered postman of his entire indifference. His mood was one to catch at trifles.

The picture was blackened with dust and damp, and the frame, quaintly and elaborately carved in a heavy border of arabesque design, not less dilapidated.

Gerard wiped the surface with his sleeve, thus dislodging a cloud of dust, after which he applied some warm water and soap with a soft rag. The work was improved by the bath. San Girolamo appeared as the central figure, surrounded by several saints, as in the altar-picture of Squarcione's at Padua. The execution was indifferent, betraying a pupil's hand, and the coloring heavy.

Gerard smeared a little oil on the dull robe

of the saint in the foreground, and sought in a box for a bottle containing a chemical preparation much commended to him by a professional cleaner of pictures, whom he had met several times at the Accademia.

Either the proportions of the magical liquid were wrong, or the enthusiast had given Gerard another compound; for the latter had no sooner applied it to the canvas, than the folds of the red drapery began to scale off in large flakes.

The artist uttered an exclamation of surprise.

Beneath the daub of St. Jerome was concealed another picture. Intense interest in the discovery of a pictorial palimpsest found an additional stimulus in discerning the fingers of a hand, holding the great amber beads of a rosary.

Where had he before seen that hand, and those amber beads?

A cry of wonder, delight, and incredulity escaped his lips.

He forgot the house of the musician, the sisters Bardi, the pigeon perched coquettishly out of reach with a love-letter still folded under one wing.

Calculating the distance from the hand, with a rapid glance, he attacked the canvas with a reckless haste which might have proved fatal to careful restoration, and, by a fortunate chance, beheld an opaque mass melt slowly away, revealing a familiar head.

Mistake was no longer possible; doubt faded: the Venetian portrait was before Gerard Grootz, had been with him all this time, concealed beneath the grime and blackness of St. Jerome and his lugubrious attendants. How? Why? Was this the original work, and the treasure of the Van Limburg gallery a clever copy, a fraud?

Heart and brain asked these questions, as the youth hung upon the self-imposed task with ardent zeal and devouring curiosity.

At length he paused; sudden fear of marring the precious work, so long preserved by the outer coating of paint, staying his hand in the use of palette-knife, rag, and fluid.

He had seen enough. The outline of the noble form was there, beheld through a veil of clogging patches and blemishes; and the haughty glance was turned upon him, so full of pride, yet vital with intelligence and power,

which had thrilled him as a boy with profound emotion.

A true vertigo of enthusiasm overwhelmed Gerard. He laughed until the tears came to his eyes, ran to the door to call the Bardi household, altered his mind, and halted on the threshold.

Returning to the picture, he seized it, and ruthlessly knocked off the frame. He wished to hang the portrait on the wall, as he had first beheld the other. The rusted hook had broken when he had taken down St. Jerome. He went to the back of the *sala*, and dismounted the Italy so rudely that the pigeon once more took flight. The hooks supporting this work of art also broke in the precipitate descent.

Again the countenance of Gerard flushed with vexation at a trifling annoyance. The portrait should be hung there, in a good light, where he could gaze at it in a leisurely manner, and assure himself the whole discovery was not a dream.

The need of movement had much to do with his excitement. He took up his hat, and rushed out of the house.

At the expiration of half an hour, he came back furnished with a hammer and some wire and strong nails.

Exulting in his own energy, he climbed on the stool, and drove a nail into the wall, in a space between the supports of the Italy which had hung there so long, and lower down in the surface.

At the second blow of the hammer the nail disappeared in the wall.

Gerard stared first at the dark wainscot, and then at the hammer, puzzled by the accident.

To select another nail from the store, and repeat the attempt still more vigorously, was the natural sequence.

The nail vanished as mysteriously as its predecessor, taking with it the head of the hammer.

Gerard drew a long breath. Astonishment held him motionless for a moment.

That portion of the wall, where the nails and hammer had entered with a startling rapidity, was a thin partition, concealing some recess in the apparently solid masonry.

All the histories he had ever read in the

paragraphs of journals, or heard recounted among his fellow-students of the art-school, thronged his mind. The mediæval castle with secret chambers, the ancient *château* with hiding-places for fugitive princes behind the chimney, and the town mansion where the print of the mason's hand might still be discerned on the plaster of the cellar wall where the family plate and jewels had been deposited before the Revolution, were not unknown even to this dreamer of the studio. Such straws on the tide of marvellous recital, such waifs of the daily press, recurred to his mind as he paused there, amazed at his discovery.

He again took up his hat, and locked the door after him, — a precaution taken mechanically, — and descended the stairway.

He paused irresolutely on the lower landing. Should he tell the Bardi family? Should he summon Gesualda, with her shrewd wit, to his aid? What was there to impart, after all? Had he seen Bianca at the window, he would have spoken; but the apartment was silent, and apparently deserted.

The young man hastened through the court,

and sought a charcoal and wood merchant near by, where he borrowed a heavy axe for an hour, slipping a franc into the grimy palm of the good-humored dealer, by way of compensation.

The quarter was unusually deserted, for it was the hour of the drawing of the lottery in the piazza.

Gerard went and returned without observation. He noticed that the *scirrocco* was increasing in violence, and the waters of the canal commenced to overflow the quays.

The task he had set himself, of exploring the recess, was no very difficult one. Selecting the spot where the hammer-head had disappeared, several blows of the axe made the partition crumble sufficiently for the insertion of the blade, when twenty minutes of further effort caused the whole to yield, and a black space opened before him.

He shrank back in some apprehension. What mystery had lain concealed yonder for years? Was it the door of some secret stairway? Would the ghostly shape of skeleton in armor, or unfaithful wife, thus walled up, confront him?

Gerard lighted the brass candelabra, and advanced it into the aperture, half anticipating a dull explosion of confined air.

All was silent and obscure. Gaining courage, he entered the place, and looked about him. The recess had evidently been made for the purpose now fulfilled, and the work of the partition was much fresher than that of the adjacent wall. A chest, bound with iron clamps, occupied the place. Gerard tried the lid, and found it fastened. What impulse led him to scrutinize the lock? Why should he remember that he had removed the key from the other chest in the room of the musical instruments, after restoring the book taken from Marina Bardi? The key had fitted loosely in the lock, as if the chest had been already tampered with, or the wards were too large.

Gerard left the candelabra lighted on the floor of the recess, hastened to his own chamber, found the key, and returned with it in his hand.

A knock on the studio-door startled him. He paused, and glanced towards the portal with a confused sense of being tracked and discovered in some misdeed. He had forgotten

that he had slid the bolt on entering, but now he rejoiced in the precaution.

Daniele Falcioni tried the door, shook it, and called several times with marked impatience of tone.

Gerard stood motionless, as if paralyzed, holding the key in rigid fingers. Daniele Falcioni, the enemy of the household, had no right to be there at such a juncture. Ah, if he could enter now, and peer about with his sharp eyes ! But he should not enter.

The usurer again knocked, and then slowly departed, his footsteps echoing heavily on the stair.

Gerard flew to the recess, knelt, fitted the key in the lock, and was scarcely surprised to have it yield. He raised the lid, and peeped into the case.

The first impression made on his senses was that the *scrigno* was full of folds of lace ; the second, that two heaps of golden pieces of money, and gems, were equally divided in the bottom of the receptacle.

He took up a folded book of leather, and read an enclosed slip of paper, which was faded, yellow, yet still decipherable : —

“ Wedding dowries of my daughters Marina and Bianca, which I vow never to touch ; and may death sooner take me than that I prove false to my word.”

Beside the pocket-book was a volume of patterns, which he opened, and discovered that it was the work of Nicolo d'Aristotite, detto Zoppino, 1537.

Then he turned with a reverent touch the twin piles of creamy lace, vaguely aware of the value of the hoard stored away in the alcove, — *merletti* in leaves, points ; many an airy fabric of grouped design, wrought by Venetian women in their homes, on cushions, for the coronation of kings in distant lands ; wrought by nuns in the cloister, with patient skill, for altars and ecclesiastical garments ; and not to be confounded with the industry of the lagoons.

Suddenly Gerard drew back, flushing with shame. These fairy textures and shimmering jewels did not belong to him. He closed the lid of the coffer, and emerged into the room.

The pigeon, utterly forgotten in these novel pre-occupations of the artist, had sipped water

from the little cup, pecked the grain in the saucer, and finally perched on the portrait, as it rested against the wainscot awaiting the driving-in of a new nail. Weary of inaction, Marco ruffled his shining plumage, and pecked at the silken thread about his neck. As Gerard approached, the detached slip of paper fluttered from beneath the bird's wing down on the floor. "It is true, I had forgotten thee, Marco," said the young man aloud.

He picked up the paper. Delay had rendered the note superfluous, for he was going now to notify the family of his extraordinary discovery. He opened the paper as he moved towards the door, and with his hand on the bolt read,—

"Marina is strange to-day. I believe she is mad. She is taking me away. Oh, follow us quickly, I pray you!"
BIANCA."

For an instant Gerard stood as if crushed by a blow, then he sprang down the stair.

The door of the Bardi apartment was closed. Gesualda and the dwarf Pippo entered the court below, talking together with a certain animation and perceptible ruefulness. The

numbers of the lottery had drawn, and they had lost.

“I wish to see the ladies,” said Gerard, reassured by their appearance.

“Eh! Come in, then,” retorted Gesualda.

But Gerard did not enter.

“The ladies have not been with you in the piazza, then?” he persisted.

“Madonna! No! They are both at home, where I left them,” said Gesualda, using the key she always carried in her pocket to open the door.

Pippo eyed the artist in silence.

Soon Gesualda returned with a puzzled expression, although no concern was perceptible in her bearing. She turned over a letter in her hand.

“They have gone out,” she announced, speaking more slowly. “I found this envelope on the table.”

The missive was addressed to Gerard, in the handwriting of Marina.

The young man snatched the envelope from the fingers of the wondering nurse, opened and strove to read the enclosed sheet, but the characters swam before his eyes.

Pippo the dwarf sidled nearer, and pulled Gerard's sleeve, whispering hoarsely,—

“Where have they gone, *signore*?”

The *scirrocco* wind, sweeping in from the misty stretch of sea and the fretted lagoons, moaned about the house of the musician for all answer.

CHAPTER IX.

ADRIATIC WAVES.

THAT morning, the dwarf Pippo had been abroad with the dawn, not so much from urgent necessity of labor, as because he could not sleep.

He had taken the birds under his coat, and crept through many a by-way to the piazza, attracted by the fascination of rehearsing the familiar scene of the drawing of the lottery, which would transpire later.

The gambling instinct of thus taking his chances of rising to sudden and giddy opulence, by a turn of fortune's wheel, had been imbibed with his mother's milk.

"He is a fool who plays too much, or not at all," says the Venetian proverb.

Pippo and Gesualda were allies in the evil times that had befallen the musician's family; nor had repeated failures diminished the ardor of their calculations founded on the decease of

Leonardo Bardi, with the attendant circumstances.

The previous week, Gesualda had succeeded in dreaming of a cardinal, a cat, and a cucumber, all on the same night, — a most favorable augury ; and had combined with Pippo in buying a *terno*.

“This time we shall win, my little manikin,” she had proclaimed.

Imbued with her enthusiasm, the dwarf had issued forth at daybreak to view the spot.

Gradually the pale light of day increased over the wide space of piazza ; but no rosy clouds flecked the sky, no pearly mists veiled the lagoons and distant mountain-peaks ready to melt in the first rays of the rising sun. The clouds were sombre and tawny, and the wind blew in fitful gusts. Every blemish and stain of decay in the city became visible, columns and arcades garish, ornaments tawdry, without mellowing shadow. The *scirrocco* demeaned beauty by an impure breath, sullyng marble, arousing stagnant odors, smearing frescos and gilding.

The Church of St. Mark alone withstood this debasing influence, and the mosaics glowed

like jewels in the moist atmosphere. The horses of Lysippus seemed to gaze down on little Pippo and the cage of birds, as they had viewed humanity thus dwarfed for centuries, whether from the Roman arches of Trajan, Nero, and Domitian, or the Hippodrome of Constantinople, spurning portico and roof.

Pippo did not gaze back at the bronze steeds. He looked instead at the gates that would close later, and the orphan boy draw forth the lucky numbers of the lottery from the receptacle.

“Who knows? If we win the *terno*, I will take a *quartiere* on the Canale Grande, and live like a noble,” mused the dwarf, caressing his favorite parrakeet Giovanni. “Thou need sell no more leaves of fortune to gain our bread, my pet, but live in a large cage all gilded.”

Never had Giovanni appeared more lively and intelligent. The bird sidled along Pippo's finger, and then, hopping to the brink of the box, evinced a desire to draw forth a card which should forecast the horoscope of these partners in business.

Pippo laughed, restored the parrakeets to

their tiny house, and took his way back once more to his own quarter.

Several hours later, he crossed the court of the Gothic palace, and climbed the outer stairway. His movements were so quiet that he approached Gerard and Bianca on the landing, without being perceived by them. The lovers had paused for a whispered colloquy, a fleeting caress, and stood for a moment with hands clasped, searching each other's eyes for charming, half-fathomed secrets.

"Oh, ho!" quoth Pippo, and his black eyes twinkled with glee.

The interview was manifestly clandestine. Then Marina Bardi did not know of the true situation?

The lovers separated; Gerard ascending to the studio, while Bianca paused below, pressing a little note to her lips, drawn from her bosom.

Unconscious of the sharp eyes watching her, the young girl restored the note to the folds of her dress, and glided in the door.

The slip of paper had fallen to the ground, and Pippo lost no time in securing and reading it eagerly. Pippo delighted in prying into

the secrets of other people ; and, for the moment, his satisfaction had no wider range of purpose. He possessed the lively curiosity of a monkey, and the pertinacity of a rodent in worming his way through all difficulties to attain an end, especially if the matter did not concern him.

He waited for a suitable length of time, then requested to see Marina Bardi.

The latter was seated in the same place where she had first sung to Gerard on the night when young Love entered the dark apartment. She was listlessly tuning her guitar, and responded with indifference to the greeting of this frequent visitor.

“ Try your chance with fortune, *signorina*,” coaxed Pippo, approaching with his cage.

Giovanni, the parrakeet, stepped forth gravely, and drew a little card from the box ; but whether the bird was less adroit than usual, or Marina received it carelessly, the message of fortune slipped from her lap to the edge of her robe.

Pippo stooped to recover his wares, and dropped the slip of paper which he had thrust up his sleeve.

Marina placed her foot on it. The instinct of teasing the dwarf existed in the Bardi household, as well as in the *campo*.

“Why do you carry a paper up your sleeve, *gobbo*?” she demanded.

“Give it to me,” cried Pippo shrilly.

He was a trifle frightened by the mishap, and he also intended to make some money out of restoring the note to Gerard.

Oh! what would be the result if Marina Bardi read the paper?

Some quick perception of the truth flashed through Pippo’s brain, as he flung himself on the floor, and strove to wrest the treasure from his tormentor.

Marina was surprised and amused by his trepidation. She caught up the paper, and, holding it high above his head, read the scrap aloud: —

DEAREST BIANCA, — A thousand thanks for your last sweet message. Try to persuade the sister to give me a sitting to-day, in order that we may be together. I often ask myself when this irksome secrecy will end.

GERARD.

A change, swift and terrible, transfigured the previous listlessness of Marina Bardi to

glowing wrath, as her gaze devoured these lines.

Pippo sidled away to the door, and lingered on the threshold, like an imp of evil omen.

“Eh! The *signorina*, would have it,” he said mockingly. “I did not give her the note. They were on the landing just now. *Per Bacco!* They are lovers, those two. All the quarter knows it.”

Marina sprang towards the dwarf, and pursued him out on the landing. With the rapidity of lightning she wrested the cage of parakeets from his grasp, and hurled it down the stairway.

Then she returned indoors with the same celerity, and closed the portal behind her, leaving Pippo an aghast and stupefied spectator of his own work.

“If she had not seized them, she would have killed me,” reflected the manikin. “*Misericordia!* What a woman!”

He crept down the stair, step by step, and approached the cage fearfully. The parakeets were tumbled together in a little heap of green feathers, with Giovanni underneath his brothers. Alas! Giovanni, most sagacious

of little birds, most faithful servant of a street-vender of fortune-cards, was dead. How lively and intelligent he had been at the dawn, when he strove to draw a favorable augury for Pippo from the box which formed their joint stock in trade! If the parrakeet could but have foretold his own doom, he must have warned his master to avoid Marina Bardi in a black mood of ill-humor.

The dwarf uttered a cry of rage and despair, and went forth to tell his woes to his world. The *signorina* had killed his bird, in a fit of anger. He refrained from stating more fully the cause of Marina's displeasure.

The neighbors listened sympathetically, and poked the tiny corpse as it lay in Pippo's palm. Giovanni knew as much as a Christian, all were agreed; and now he was dead. It is a pity to die when a bird knows as much as a Christian, just as a mortal should live forever when blessed with wealth. Madonna! What a world it is!

Marina Bardi, in one flash of painful and intense conviction, realized the truth.

The foreign artist, who had intruded on their lives so strangely and unexpectedly,

loved her sister, and not herself. She had believed otherwise. She had been duped, blinded, befooled, by her own vanity. The exacting, domineering nature of the woman, requiring to come first in all things, could not tamely brook the insult.

She did not love Gerard Grootz. Far from it. The blond stripling was only a feeble and colorless substitute of her lover, the glowing, ardent Sicilian officer, in the prime of manhood. Marina had read devotion and homage to herself in the artist's absorbed study of her features and form. A responsive chord of sympathy was awakened in her breast and imagination. Gerard Grootz would gain fame by painting her, even as the masters of old reproduced the women they loved, in every phase of study, from Madonna to goddess and nymph. She forgot herself in the contemplation of this new aim in life. Hence her soft grace of acquiescence to the exactions of the painter. Hence her reveries and castle-building, during the long hours of winter, with new found hope crowning the battlements.

Now the dwarf, by a sting of covert ridi-

cule, had awakened her to a realization of the situation.

The soul of Marina Bardi was blighted by this second blow, as a leaf of paper blackens and shrivels in the devouring flame. She crouched in her chair for a space, in a menacing silence, her fiery and unfathomable eyes fixed on vacancy, the fury and wrong of the past confronted by the degradation of the present hour. Words from her closed lips would have rushed to their goal like winged snakes, emanating from a spirit baleful and terrible.

At length she rose, and opened the door of Bianca's chamber.

The girl was seated at a table, writing. Her cheeks were flushed with a rosy glow, and a happy light shone in her eyes, while a smile hovered about her lips.

If a look could have blighted the living object on whom it rested, the vindictive scrutiny of Marina would have petrified the unconscious Bianca.

"What are you doing, dear little one?" said the elder sister, in her habitual caressing tone.

“Copying verses of Tasso to improve my handwriting,” replied Bianca, without glancing up, and a roguish dimple became visible in her cheek.

Marina contemplated her, marvelling at her fresh beauty ; and a mournful, stricken expression dawned in her own dark eyes. This child lied. She was writing to the lover above stairs. Both united in cheating her, prevaricated on every possible occasion, laughed in the sleeve at her credulity. Let them beware ! The affection of years for the younger child, almost maternal in indulgence, turned to a tide of seething hatred in her heart. For one awful moment of peril, in the anguish of self-conflict, Bianca’s fate trembled in the balance of crushing violence, as the birds had done.

Marina returned to the outer room, and commenced to write a letter, in turn, with rapidly flowing sentences, pauses, erasures, and blots.

She frowned haughtily when Bianca approached with some trivial prattle, and motioned her away.

The letter completed, Marina sought the

studio, as already described, scanned Gerard's work, and brought away with her the glass case containing the violin.

Her bearing was sufficiently collected, with only a certain repressed excitement perceptible, which she skilfully turned to the account of family rancor against Daniele Falcioni, when questioned by Bianca.

The picture was finished, and the usurer would claim the Stradivarius. They were in his debt, and the precious violin must be relinquished. Such a result was inevitable.

Bianca became excited and agitated in turn, imbued by the disquiet of her sister. What if Daniele Falcioni saw fit to also claim the roof above their heads?

"Let us go out," suggested Marina, with assumed carelessness, and as if to terminate a painful discussion. "No, I will not pose for the artist to-day. My head aches."

In her own chamber she lavished few cares on her toilet. She removed the violin from the case, cut the strings with a knife, severed the bridge, and gashed the wood in deep scores of the lustrous surface. The deed was

accomplished with a swiftness, strength, and ferocity destined to render the famous instrument mute forever. The fragments were then replaced in the case, covered with amber silk, and a slip of paper attached, on which she wrote : —

Daniele Falcioni,

*From the grateful daughters of
Leonardo Bardi.*

Placing the letter which she had inscribed at an earlier hour, beside the violin-case on a table, she made a rapid gesture of farewell to the chamber, and summoned Bianca to accompany her out.

Bianca had peeped into the door, and seen the violin destroyed. She made no comment. Fear and surprise held her dumb.

“Are you ready?” Marina called from the vestibule.

“A moment, I pray you. I seek my gloves,” retorted Bianca.

“Little coquette!” responded Marina jestingly.

Bianca drew a long, shuddering breath. She was not searching for missing gloves, but

had attached the note to the neck of the carrier-pigeon, with the summons to Gerard to follow her.

Gesualda was in the kitchen. Bianca paused irresolutely.

"We must tell her that we are going out," she demurred, with a doubtful glance at Marina.

"Let her alone. We shall return in half an hour," said the elder sister, yawning slightly.

"Gesualda seems to have lost her head this morning," said Bianca. "I believe it is the lottery."

"Who knows?" was the enigmatical response.

The walk was not as purposeless as it at first appeared. Marina left Bianca gazing in at the window of a jeweller's shop, retraced her steps along a narrow *calle*, and entered the Monte di Pietà, where she unhesitatingly pawned the valuable watch and chain of her father.

Before rejoining Bianca, she sought a stand of *gondoliere* of the vicinity, and, avoiding the older men, talked long and earnestly with a

young fellow of sturdy build, and a good-humored, *insouciant* physiognomy.

As a result of the colloquy, Marina sprang lightly into the gondola, and was taken around the corner into a dark little canal, where, beneath an arching bridge, she divided the money received for the watch into two piles. One portion she thrust into the hand of the bewildered *gondoliere*, and restored the other to her own purse.

"Listen! We must go over there to meet an old servant of our family this morning," she explained. "It is an affair of property and creditors, my friend. If you take us swiftly, the rest of this sum of money will belong to you as well."

The *gondoliere* shrugged his broad shoulders.

"*Altro!* I do not object to running a little risk now and then, and one must live. The wind is rising, *signora*, and soon" —

"It is perfectly safe at this hour," interposed Marina imperiously.

Bianca was astonished to hear the voice of her sister calling to her by name from the water. Approaching the bridge, she discerned

Marina in the gondola, leaning back languidly among the cushions.

“We are to go on the canal in such weather!” exclaimed the young girl, shrinking back.

“The weather is good, *signorina*,” protested the *gondoliere* eagerly.

The money intoxicated him, and he longed to claim the rest.

“I am tired,” said Marina. “Let us go back thus.”

Relieved of her vague apprehensions, Bianca entered the gondola. Marina’s hand, cold, but firm as steel, closed on her wrist, as if holding her prisoner. Bianca did not attempt to release her soft arm. They would be home as soon as the pigeon delivered the note, she reasoned, and Gerard would laugh at her fears. Still she did not like the glitter of Marina’s eye, her quiet demeanor, the set look of her mouth.

The gondola threaded rapidly the most sheltered by-ways, then suddenly swept out on the broader space where the tide was beginning to run high.

The sea-flood threatened the city.

Bianca uttered a wondering cry.

“Oh, why are we here?” she demanded piteously. The grasp of Marina’s fingers on her wrist tightened.

“Don’t be a fool!” she whispered, in menacing accents. “The *gondoliere* must suspect nothing, or he might be tempted to rob us. Listen. Something has happened to Gesualda, and she has sent for us to come over here immediately. Child! The message was very curious. I will tell you later, when the man yonder is not all ears. Oh, I do not believe it is a misfortune! Hush! Gesualda must have found a treasure.”

“A treasure?” gasped Bianca, and her blue eyes dilated with childish surprise. “Gesualda should have told us at home, and not have sent for us out here, when *scirrocco* is beginning to blow.”

“We can return as soon as we find her. Do you fear that the artist will miss you too much?” inquired Marina, with a bitter sneer.

Bianca blushed, and became silent.

The light craft skimmed over the water in the direction of the sandy ledge, until Marina indicated a spot where she wished to land.

She allowed Bianca to first step ashore.

“Look for Gesualda, and bid her hasten back with us,” she urged.

“How can Gesualda be here, when we left her in the kitchen at home?” protested Bianca, with fresh misgivings.

“You must ask her that question. Go!”

Bianca, thus admonished, and fearful of the threatening aspect of sea and sky, lost no time in obeying.

“Gesualda!” she called aloud, running over the sands, and looking eagerly about for the stout and familiar figure of the nurse.

Marina placed the remainder of the sum promised in the palm of the *gondoliere*.

“Now go back while the canal is safe,” she said.

The man stared at her doubtfully.

“How will the ladies return?” he demurred.

“Oh, we are not going back to-day,” she replied with a smile. “Our old servant lives among the fisher-folk yonder.”

“To-morrow there will be a sea-flood in the city,” warned the *gondoliere*, shaking his head.

“Then we will remain,” said Marina Bardi, still smiling. “Ah! I like the storm.”

“Gesualda is not here,” cried Bianca, retracing her steps. “I have searched for her. Oh, it is some trick, Marina *mia*. Did the dwarf tell you? Let us go back at once.”

Marina was walking toward her. The gondola had turned in the direction of the town.

Bianca paused, grew pale, and reeled beneath the shock of terror and bewilderment. Oh, why had she consented to enter the gondola at all? She read her own doom in the stern look fixed upon her by Marina, and, falling on her knees, burst into sobs and tears.

“Oh, what is it?” shrieked the girl. “What has happened, that we may not go home in the gondola? You will drive me mad if you look at me like that.”

Marina threw herself down on the sands beside her cowering companion, and, taking the blonde head of Bianca between her hands, covered curls and brow with hot and rapid kisses.

“I love thee, little one!” she said wildly. “Ah, I have brought thee away safely from all evil. Child, Gesualda is not here. We are alone, the Bardi daughters, dearest. This is

the end. Even our house will soon be taken from us. There remains for us only to die."

At these words Bianca, flushed and panting, tore herself, by a desperate effort, from the arms encircling her, and fled towards the sandy brink of shore, screaming aloud for help.

The gondola was rapidly disappearing, and the wind bore away the sound of her voice unheard.

Marina followed her.

"Shriek thyself hoarse, and weep thyself blind, my beautiful angel. No one will hear," she said tauntingly.

Bianca wrung her hands together in an agony of despair, and continued to strain her eyes gazing over the waters. Surely help must come!

Marina approached nearer. The contemplation of the girl's agitation and fear seemed to inspire in her a savage joy, much as a feline creature plays with the trembling prey before devouring it.

"Did you love the artist?" she demanded fiercely.

"Yes," faltered Bianca.

“Poor child! I save thee from all the miseries of deception and cruel desertion.”

“But Gerard loves me,” said Bianca wonderingly.

“Loves thee!” echoed the elder sister with scornful bitterness. “Loves thee with a boy’s sportive fancy, and until he meets another girl with a skin as white and hair as yellow as thine! Loves thee as an artist, until he finds a new model. We have sheltered a traitor beneath our roof.”

“It is false! Oh, he is good, and he loves me,” cried Bianca, with sudden spirit.

The next moment she cowered before Marina’s look, fell again on her knees, and, stretching out her hands towards the city, began to pray with a fervor of appeal urged by despair.

Gerard must have received her note by the faithful pigeon. Gesualda must have missed her nursling by this time, and be arousing the neighbors by her cries and lamentations, to hasten to the rescue.

The quivering lips framed every supplication ever taught them in the parish church, and implored the aid of all the saints of the calendar. Buoyed up by her own supplica-

tions, she beheld Gerard, as in a vision, coming over the water, the St. George strong to rescue.

Marina observed her curiously. She listened without respect, but also without derision.

“What use to pray?” she scoffed. “The saints will not hear. They never help trouble and pain. Do I not know?”

Then Bianca cast herself at Marina’s feet, and besought to be spared. Why should they die, when life was so beautiful?

In all her fawning caresses and tears, instinct prompted the girl to gain time, to divert the sombre thoughts of her sister, and avert the danger, even by an hour, a moment, hanging over their heads.

“No!” retorted Marina.

Gradually she ceased to listen to the appeals of the young creature clinging to her feet. She had finished with the wearisome bondage called life. The straw of Gerard’s devotion, at which she had caught with eager fingers, had broken, casting her back into the gulf; and as the ground crumbled beneath her feet, she had taken Bianca with her. Bianca was to be the lamb sacrificed on this altar of a terrible vengeance. She saved the child in her

innocence. Bianca should not be left behind to suffer for the love of man.

The exaltation of her mood was fast gaining upon her. She cast aside her hat, and loosened the heavy masses of her black hair, turning a look of irrepressible longing towards the sea. Out there amidst the tossing surges were to be found oblivion, annihilation.

The spot was isolated, and the weather rendered the scene one of most tragic desolation. The sisters stood on a waste of sand, which wended inland in irregular mounds, seamed by sluggish pools and winding channels. The low-hanging clouds seemed to mingle their dun-colored masses with the billows of the Adriatic, which were tawny and crested with foam, as they beat on the shore with ever-increasing violence. Lightning flashed on the horizon, and the tide flowing towards Venice in the channels had acquired the tint of jade-stone.

Not a human being was in sight. A sail flitted before the blast, and several sea-birds winged their flight across the Lido. The gondola could not have made its way here at this hour.

Time had ceased for Marina Bardi. Bianca, exhausted by her own supplications, lay prone on the ground, stunned by the thunder of the surf and the rush of the wind.

“Enough!” exclaimed Marina, arousing her victim roughly. “I have listened patiently and long. Finish.”

She dragged the trembling Bianca to an upright posture, and took from her bosom a thin and flat bottle which contained a white liquid.

“Half for thee, and half for me,” she said.

A wail of despair was wrung from Bianca’s lips at these words; but only the sea-birds answered her, by a harsh note, as they flew past overhead.

Marina had found this phial in the chest of the musician’s chamber. The glass stopple was covered with skin, and by way of label Leonardo Bardi had written:—

The Great Temptation.

She now tore off the skin covering the cork, and proffered it to Bianca.

“Drink!” she commanded.

Bianca received the fatal bottle in her cold

hands, and looked fixedly at her sister. Escape was impossible. Hope was spent.

Marina's eyes wavered, shifted, and she averted her head. No! Even in the shadowy land beyond, she could not confront the ordeal of having watched Bianca put the bottle to her lips.

There was a momentary silence before Marina extended her fingers to receive back the phial. Even then she moved away, without again looking at her companion. She heard a feeble cry behind her, and was dimly aware that Bianca had fallen insensible on the sands.

The distant city was already a blank, the girl on the sands forgotten; for before her extended the sea, storm-driven.

"*Enrico mio!*" she cried aloud; and the mingled voices of the tossing surges and the wind caught up the name, until the prolonged echo filled all space.

The *scirrocco* lifted her tangled hair, the salt spray blinded her, the wide-spreading circles of white foam obliterated her footsteps.

What did she behold, pausing there on the brink of eternity? A leaf caught in the eddy

of the tempest, a creature of the dust blaspheming against her Creator, — surely in the awful flash of awakening, as the lightning sparkled on the dim horizon, and in the emptiness and darkness of her soul's misery, she saw

“The grave's mouth, the heaven's gate, God's face
With implacable love evermore.”

And so slept.

In the city, the three persons most interested in the fate of the Bardi sisters stood on the landing, and looked at each other in perplexity.

Gerard strove to decipher the tangled thread of Marina's reproaches, taunts, and threats, in the letter. He was too bewildered to grasp the full meaning of her passionate self-vindication at once, although the shadow of her meaning fell upon him with a chill presentiment of evil. She had been betrayed by his admiration into believing him her own suitor instead of the lover of Bianca. Such was the burthen of the missive. She had quitted the house of the musician forever.

Where had she gone?

Gesualda's face lengthened. Pippo watched the artist furtively, and a gray tinge pervaded his features. Did the dwarf experience remorse, or a superstitious dread of the turn of events? He was the first to break the silence.

"The Signorina Marina certainly had an attack of the nerves to-day. She killed my parakeet this morning, in a fit of passion. *Misericordia!* I must bury Giovanni in the garden at least," he said, in a whining tone of personal injury.

He descended to the court, and removed the tiny corpse from a niche in the sculptured well. The wrought lid had served the parakeet for a most majestic chamber of death, where he had lain since morning in state. Pippo dug a little grave near the pomegranate tree of the garden, and buried his pet, uttering groaning lamentations the while. He hated the sea, and to have dropped the parakeet into the canal would have been to add a tribute to the mighty foe always threatening life beyond the narrow barrier of Lidi.

Left alone with Gesualda, Gerard communi-

cated his fears to her, that, from the tenor of the letter, Marina had discovered the love of Bianca and himself, and was bitterly offended. She should not have been deceived as to the true state of their mutual relation.

“What good could come of so much prevarication?” exclaimed the young man, with anger and swift contrition.

“True,” assented Gesualda, nodding her head. “The little one would have it so. Young girls are like that.”

“Marina reproaches me as a traitor,” added Gerard.

“*Poveretta!* she has been so unfortunate, that every thing goes to her head,” said the nurse.

Even now the apprehensions of Gesualda were not deep. Gerard bit his lip, and hesitated. Should he tell her more? Surely not.

“I must find them without delay in this weather,” he said.

“*Altro!* They cannot have gone far from home. I must have been in the kitchen when they went out, and even the little one said nothing to me.”

Gerard laid his hand on Gesualda's shoulder,

and led her up-stairs to the studio. He showed her the picture, half cleansed of a later covering, and then the recess containing the chest.

Gesualda trembled, and burst into tears. Her usual voluble exclamations completely failed her tongue. She understood all now.

Leonardo Bardi had taken the jewels and lace of his wife, added a sum of money as the dowry of his daughters, and stored their portion in the chest of this concealed recess.

Well did Gesualda remember the time when the violinist had made alterations and repairs of the upper floor, with the intention of dwelling permanently at Venice. She also recalled his statement that he had made suitable provision for his children, on the occasion of his subsequent departure. Why had he hidden the treasure? Did he fear the passion for gambling which consumed him, more than the entrance of other thieves?

He had returned to Venice restless and unhappy, and given his consent to Marina's wedding the officer. At the same time he had made the reservation that Bianca was too young for marriage.

The girl, in her petulant jealousy, had rebelled and perhaps driven him to self-destruction. The knife and the key found beside him on the floor explained a temptation to rifle the chest in secret, and the pistol the final resistance.

Gesualda dried her tears, and embraced Gerard with rapture.

“You must guard the place in my absence,” he said, moved by her enthusiasm.

“I will keep watch. Never fear! Only bid the children come home quickly; whisper a word in their ear, that their old Gesualda awaits them. Ah! who can say the lottery has not turned up lucky numbers for us to-day?”

She locked the door, and put the key in her pocket, with a gesture signifying that Daniele Falcioni or any other intruder must enter the studio only across her inert body.

In the streets general uneasiness prevailed. The water hissed and gurgled through every aperture, and brimmed above the rim of quay and bridge.

The task of following the Bardi sisters had seemed practicable enough at the outset; and

yet Gerard found himself baffled at every turn, by careless indifference and absolute ignorance. One neighbor remembered having seen them pass at an early hour of the day. Another believed they took the direction of the Rialto.

The artist went and came, found traces and lost them again; while the town watched the waters lap the marble pavement of churches, and glide beneath doors into vestibule and court.

An hour elapsed in this fruitless search.

Pippo called to him from the battlement of the wall, where the dwarf was perched, watching the general confusion. Pippo detested the slimy, encroaching waters, as disturbing him in his accustomed routine; yet he enjoyed the discomfiture of the citizens.

“Why not ask Daniele Falcioni?” he suggested. “Eh! The usurer has the scent of a bird of prey.”

Gerard pondered on the proposition, and it acquired value in his eyes. He had refrained from seeking Falcioni, as the enemy of the family. In addition, he did not intend to reveal his own discoveries of the morning.

He found Falcioni superintending the removal of his treasures to an upper floor, beyond the reach of the increasing canal.

The latter fixed his piercing glance on the young man's agitated face, and made no comment.

"Where is the letter?" he inquired, after a pause.

Gerard tendered the envelope mechanically. At a time less critical he would have hesitated to do so.

Falcioni's glance ran over the lines, unmoved, and pounced on the closing sentence of the blotted page:—

"The sea always calls me."

"Yes, the sea can be heard very distinctly to-day," said Gerard meditatively.

"The girl is quite mad. She has gone to the sea," said Falcioni decisively.

Gerard grew pale, staggered, and caught at a post for support.

"To the sea?" he reiterated. "How can she have reached it?"

"Eh! Some boatman took her at an earlier hour, if well paid for the risk. Does not the pretty Bianca suspect as much?"

"She has gone also," stammered Gerard.

"*Dio!*" ejaculated the older man, and his countenance became serious.

The dwarf Pippo had estimated Daniele Falcioni at his true value, as one gifted with peculiar sagacity in arriving at a desired result; or was it that a profound knowledge of human nature, albeit sceptical and contemptuous, guided him in this as in all other emergencies?

Falcioni directed his steps to the Monte di Pietà, and noted speedily a watch and chain, pledged on that same day, which he recognized as belonging to Leonardo Bardi.

Then he went to the nearest *traghetto* of gondolas, and questioned the *gondoliere*. All were ready to assist him to a certain extent, mindful of his wealth and influence. The young Antonio was dining at a neighboring *osteria*. He had taken two ladies in his gondola in the morning, at least through the city.

Antonio, when questioned, was found to be a trifle flushed with wine, and surly in mood. He had taken two ladies across to the Lido, at an early hour, for a reasonable price. What of that? They went to visit an old servant

who dwelt among the fisher-folk, and did not intend to return immediately.

At sight of Gerard's face the young *gondoliere* had paused, and grown pale, in turn, beneath the bronze of cheek and throat. Eh! He was an honest man. What devil's plot had he got into? He remembered now, that the smile of the handsome woman made one feel cold.

Falcioni took him by the arm.

"If you carried those girls over yonder, you should be willing to fetch them back," he insisted with severity.

Antonio's pride fired up. *Altro!* He was ready to lend a hand. He was not afraid to go where any gondolier in Venice might venture, only a cockle-shell of a gondola would no longer serve for the voyage.

Falcioni waited until the stanchest craft procurable was manned and made ready, and Gerard, accompanied by Antonio, had stepped on board.

The antiquarian then prudently drew back, and retraced his way to his own quarter to guard his property. He kept all conjectures as to the fate of the Bardi sisters safely locked

in his own breast. He was a man of few words, on occasion. The house of the musician remained.

As he approached the *campo*, he noticed an unusual circumstance. The heavy portal of the Gothic palace had been closed.

Daniele Falcioni halted suddenly.

"It is to keep me out," he thought, with anger and suspicion.

"The Gesualda fears the rising waters," proclaimed the neighbors.

"Perhaps it is because the sisters will never come back," thought Pippo.

He did not dare to utter the doubt aloud, but slunk into a church, and muttered a prayer. He failed to take the parrakeets into his confidence on this occasion. Did he pray for the repose of the spirit of the lost Giovanni?

Daniele Falcioni knocked on the door, a summons that echoed in mournful reverberations through the interior.

Rumor was abroad in the very air, that some misfortune, tragic and terrible, had befallen the Bardi sisters. They had left their home in anger, and gone away together.

People gathered in knots, and gazed at the familiar exterior of the Gothic *palazzo* with the fresh interest invariably inspired by an accident, a catastrophe. The movements of the usurer were watched in silence.

Gesualda appeared, and inspected the visitor through a little casement, protected by iron bars like those of a prison. Her eyes sparkled with unwonted animation, while a bloom of happiness seemed to transfigure her swarthy lineaments.

Her aspect astonished the creditor, prepared for pallid cheeks, and eyelids swollen with weeping over the prolonged absence of her foster-children.

Gesualda, as warder of this castle, could defy Falcioni and the town.

"Has the *signore* come to receive the violin?" she inquired slyly.

"Yes. Why do you close the great gates at this hour?" demanded Falcioni, peering at her keenly.

"The canal is rising, *signore*, and the doors keep back the flood a little from the court. Wait!"

Gesualda had discovered the violin-case,

and discerned the meaning of the slip of paper attached to the silk cover. Was it not a part of the triumph of this auspicious day, that Marina should wreck the Stradivarius before giving it up to the common enemy? Gesualda gloried in the deed. She could not resist launching the premeditated defiance at the long-dreaded creditor in person.

The doors opened the width of the chain span, and Falcioni received the case, wrapped in the amber silk covering; after which the portal swiftly closed, and the bolt slid in the socket.

Still puzzled, the usurer entered his own shop. He read the paper slowly: —

Daniele Falcioni,

*From the grateful daughters of
Leonardo Bardi.*

He lifted the silk cover, and discovered the broken fragments of the matchless violin, heaped together in the glass case. A cry of pain and rage escaped from his breast.

He strode back across the *campo*, and rained repeated blows on the gate, upbraiding the

inmates for the perfidy of the act, and threatening speedy reprisals. Gesualda remained mute and invisible.

Safe within the habitation built to resist a siege of sea-pirates, if necessary, the nurse could defy Daniele Falcioni.

The boat made its way against baffling currents, now washed by an incoming wave, and again tossed high on the crest of a second billow, or plunging into a seeming vortex of angry waters. The lightning quivered from cloud to cloud, rain drenched the voyagers, and the wind tore madly at the canvas, rendering all attempts to use the sail futile. The men bent to the oars, therefore, with slow and heavy progress.

To Gerard Grootz the passage was like his own mental and moral condition. He suffered acutely, then lapsed into benumbing apathy, as the boat plunged and staggered amidst the turbid flood. The love of the two women with whom he had dwelt recurred to him vividly, terribly, like the mad sweep of the wind, the sudden blaze of the lightning. Marina's kiss on his lips had awakened manhood within him that night in the dark *sala*, when Gesu-

alda's lamp blew out. Marina's devotion had tried to shape his faltering talent to genius, by the inspiration of her presence. The words of her letter still troubled his brain.

Antonio indicated the spot where the sisters had landed, and leaped ashore. Gerard followed as if in a dream.

On the sands, a girl with golden hair was recovering from a swoon, while a fisherman bent over her, striving to bring her back to consciousness with simple restoratives. Bianca had poured the contents of the bottle down her neck, instead of drinking it, and then fallen in a faint of terror. She was alive, safe, unharmed.

Did Gerard Grootz respond to her first smile of recognition and gratitude? He never knew.

“Where is she?”

Did his pale and dry lips frame the question? Had the other men about him made the inquiry? The wind and the waters repeated it. Where is she? Ah, where is she?

Bianca understood. She raised herself, pushed back her wet tresses, and gazed fear-

fully around. "I don't know," she replied, with a shuddering sigh.

Gerard went on with rapid, uncertain step, and strained gaze fixed on the sea.

"Marina, come back! I did not understand. I never knew myself. Come back! Come back!"

Marina was gone, and the green Adriatic waves lapped on the strand where she had stood.

Gerard Grootz fell, and knew no more.

CHAPTER X.

THE PARIS SALON.

IN the year 18—, the first prize of the Salon was awarded to the artist Gerard Grootz, for a picture known as “The Suicide.”

All Paris flocked to the Salon. The ladies in fresh toilets, and their attendant cavaliers prepared to devote more attention to the smiles of capricious beauty than to discerning the merits of the works of art grouped on the walls.

Professional critics mingled with the crowd, making a note here and there. Timid foreigners, pupils of celebrated masters, hovered near their own neatly framed studies of Breton fisher-girls and Italian goat-herds, with assumed unconcern of demeanor.

There is a fitting time for a picture to be appreciated, as well as for a statesman to rise in a political convulsion, and a soldier to lead in a campaign.

The mood of the world's capital that spring was morbid, sinister, tragic. A revolution had wrecked the hopes of a dynasty; a murder or two had occurred on the boulevards; a popular author had plunged his prolific pen into a seething caldron of crime, with electrifying result to his readers; a great actress nightly writhed on the stage of the Theatre Français, in the last agonies of a lost soul.

The exhibition of the Salon indicated the fever-throb of the popular pulse. Huge canvases literally ran with blood, in every imaginable phase of carnage, from the dethronement of a king clad in ermine, to the beheading of an impostor on the steps of an Oriental palace.

"The Suicide" exercised a spell of its own.

The careworn philosopher stood long with folded arms, in rapt contemplation. The *spirituelle* lady of fashion grew pale beneath her rouge, and returned for another look at it. The most phlegmatic, cynical, frivolous, yielded to the same spell of attraction, thus forming a throng around the study of Gerard Grootz.

There was an enigma to be deciphered; and

each felt impelled to solve the problem, at least to his own mind.

The picture represented a girl fleeing over the sands towards the sea. Behind her, in the extreme limit of distance, the domes and towers of a city were visible; before her heaved the tawny Adriatic waves. To glance back at the town would be to repent; to advance to the water's brink was to perish. The scene was a familiar one. Venice was the city in the background, and the girl was traversing

“The weird sands of Lido.”

The sombre obscurity of the study possessed a certain vitality and latent power, although all accessories of life and warmth were withdrawn. Threatening clouds swept low on the horizon. A solitary bird hovered near on troubled wing; and the naked desolation of the shore, with pallid gleams of water marking the morass, and tangled roots of weeds, stretched in level, oppressive monotony, as far as the eye could reach. It was

“A bare strand
Of hillock, heaped from ever-shifting sand,
Matted with thistle and amphibious weeds.”

Cast in present shadow, the whole canvas palpitated with the promise of effulgent light. A ray tinged the distant domes, converting their surface to the semblance of pearl, and, traversing space, must soon touch the flying figure as well. Would the light come too late? In this sense of suspense lay the charm of the work.

The rude winds lifted the tresses of the girl's black hair, and swept back the draperies which enveloped her slight form. Her face, dark and beautiful, was turned towards the observer, the lips firmly set, and the eyes fixed wearily and questioningly on the spectator. In the depths of these limpid eyes was to be read a life problem, the soul-sickness that maddens, the flagging of one spent in the battle.

The crowd gazed long, and each made his own answer.

The artist was sufficiently well known by the public, as a rising man of talent, who now attained greatness in this latest effort.

In the delicate freshness of a spring day at Paris, a lady drove across the Place de la Concorde, and up the Champs Elysées.

She had arrived from Brussels the previous evening, and was prepared to enjoy a short sojourn in the capital, with the leisurely movements of one familiar with the town.

Well dressed and still young, with a dignified and composed manner, there was a heavy element in her blonde features, and an indifference about manner and glance, which betokened a calm temperament; while the firmness of mouth and chin evinced independence and decision of character, on occasion.

Madame Sturm was the wife of an Antwerp banker, and daughter of the Amsterdam merchant Jacob Van Limburg.

She entered the rooms of the exhibition, and, drawn by the throng towards a certain point of general interest, found herself standing before the work of Gerard Grootz.

The name of the painter was familiar to Madame Sturm, from early associations. Gerard Grootz had made a portrait of herself in blooming maidenhood, seated in a casement, half screened by jars of tulips. At Venice the artist had discovered a duplicate of the gem of her father's gallery, the Gior-

gione portrait. The young man had hastened to present the picture to his benefactor, as it had been found in the possession of his wife's family. Thereupon a lively controversy had arisen among art connoisseurs and even amateurs. The original dealer insisted stanchly that the first canvas was the Giorgione; and hostile ranks even hinted that Gerard had got up a clever imposture, in the Sea City, to gain a degree of personal credit from a dubious transaction.

We like to stand by our chosen gods in this world.

Jacob Van Limburg inclined to the opinion that his work was the original, and spent much time in debate, study, and correspondence with valued authorities, on the subject.

As a solution of the difficulty, the pictures were hung at either end of the gallery, framed alike, and draped with tapestry.

The greatest compliment the host could pay an honored guest was to invite him to inspect the two works, and impart his respective opinion as to which might have been attributed to Giorgione, and which to Paris Bordone or a later brush.

Madame Sturm took a chair, and gazed long at the picture, as if absorbed in thought. Her full and placid countenance remained unmoved, and her gray-blue eye untroubled. She looked at that desperate creature, forming a link in the sisterhood of woman, fleeing along the Adriatic shore, with the speculative curiosity of one sheltered from trouble, poverty, even emotion of a conflicting nature. Rachel Van Limburg was the mortal on the rock, who watches the storm sweep past in the valley, uprooting forests, and devastating hamlets, with a half-terrified fascination in the peril of others. At the same time the eyes of the girl in the picture moved her strangely, weighed her bulky prosperity, proved her tame insignificance, dwarfed her petty ambitions. The rich woman was shocked, startled, appalled. She sighed involuntarily, and then she became aware that a man was watching her attentively.

He was a stout person of medium height, with a golden moustache, twisted at the ends, and a goatee. The nobility of the brow and eyes alone saved the entire man from the commonplace aspect of a *bon-vivant*.

Madame Sturm rose, and extended her hand, with a smile.

“Monsieur Gerard Grootz, if I am not mistaken,” she said.

He bowed ceremoniously, and touched the fingers tendered him.

“I fear you have forgotten your first model, Rachel Van Limburg,” pursued Madame Sturm.

“Madame, I have never forgotten the kindness and grace of Mademoiselle Van Limburg,” replied Gerard.

A slight tinge of color warmed the fairness of the lady’s complexion.

“My father will be proud of the success of his *protégé*,” she added, with her customary suavity. “Take me to your *atelier* without delay.”

Gerard had attained the ambition of the modern artist. He dwelt in a small hotel of the Boulevard Malesherbes, with a detached studio in the rear, separated by a little garden. Both mansion and studio were filled with bronzes, statuettes, Venetian lamps, Oriental rugs and embroideries, and mediæval furniture.

Bianca welcomed Madame Sturm with her smile of infantile sweetness.

Who so happy as Bianca, returned to life from the swoon of death on the sands of Lido, and naïvely delighted by the admiration bestowed upon her at the opera and on the boulevard? Who so radiant in prosperity as Bianca, whether consenting to don a new bonnet, named for her by a fashionable milliner La Blanche, or wear at the races and in the Bois de Bologne a mantle to be designated La Belle Venetienne? Perpetual good humor lurked in her dimples, and beneath the long and silky lashes of her soft eyes. A fond mother she was, as much diverted by the *fêtes* at St. Cloud, the peep-shows of the curbstone, and the toys of the shop-windows, as were her children. The cup of her contentment was full.

Bianca never expressed a wish to revisit her native city. Once she had encountered Daniele Falcioni at Baden-Baden, and fainted at sight of the once familiar and dreaded creditor.

Gesualda also smiled on Madame Sturm, all in judging the affability of the stranger lady

a trifle cold. Doubtless the women of Gerard's native land were like her, Gesualda reasoned, not without a touch of Italian superiority.

The old nurse was contented as well. How could Bianca thrive without her care? How could the children be left to the charge of these foreign servants, or the injudicious petting of their mother, when they would run the risk of succumbing to sweetmeats like the offspring of the Turkish harem? For the rest, Gesualda would like to end her days on her native island of Burano.

Both women were very devout, and never failed in a rigorous observance of religious ceremonies, especially at the season of year when the Vigil of All Souls falls due. At that date, masses for the repose of the souls of Leonardo Bardi and his daughter were celebrated in distant Venice.

The children responded prettily to the greetings of Madame Sturm, — golden-haired and bright-eyed Bianca, Maria, and Claudia, while the boy stood dark and silent in the midst.

When the son was born, the two women whispered low, —

"We wish him christened Marino."

"So be it," replied Gerard, with whitening lips.

"Let me show Madame Sturm my favorite picture before you visit the studio," entreated Bianca, with charming insistence.

In the larger *salon* of the hotel was a fine copy of an altar-picture of St. George and the Dragon.

"Your husband's work?" questioned the visitor.

"This is only a copy of the altar-picture of our parish church at Venice, madame; but he is the San Giorgio of our lives," with a caressing glance at Gerard.

"I understand," said Rachel Van Limburg, in a musing tone.

The studio revealed to the inspection of this sympathetic critic the leading events of the artist's career.

On one wall the lovely Bianca and her children, as Venus and Cupids, siren, nymph, and cherubs, gathered all the sunshine about their soft flesh, and the shining tissues of rose and gold enveloping their limbs.

Beyond, a dwarf, with a face full of intelli-

gence and malice, perched on a flight of steps beneath a garden wall, holding a cage of parakeets on his knee, while a green canal flowed in shadow at his feet. A servant was seated in a damp court, near a sculptured well, shredding vegetables into a copper basin, with a heap of gourds, figs, and pomegranates at her side. An antiquarian, in a dark and vaulted interior, held up a goblet of ancient Venetian glass to detect flaws. Goldoni, as a boy, floated in the boat with the company of actors.

On the opposite wall, an old man, bent and worn, led a boy along the Rhine-bank in the autumn morning, with the stork's nest still visible through the fog crowning a farmhouse chimney, with a mill adjacent. A name was carved on the frame of this picture: —

The Stork Children.

Scarcely less sombre in coloring, and more weird in imagination, the next study represented the gates and court of a Gothic *palazzo* at midnight, with the phantom hosts of the dead sweeping over in the wavering mists from the cemetery island of San Michele on

the eve of All Souls, and halting for one wraith to enter, and ascend the carved stairway.

This work had obtained for the artist honorable mention the previous year.

Madame Sturm lingered long in contemplation of the adjacent group of sketches; and Gerard, ever sensitive to the influence of the companion of the moment, observed her with increasing agitation.

The same model as the subject of the prize-work gazed back at her from these designs, and the features were not those of Gerard's dimpled wife. Marina Bardi, calm, somnolent, with low smooth brow, draped as the Byzantine princess in her dull garments wrought with angels' heads, and mantle of peacock sheen, held the lily in her slender fingers. Marina Bardi, scornful and obdurate, paused erect where all knelt, bathed by the glory of golden light in the church of San Marco. Marina Bardi, transported by jealousy, stood in the gondola, with the red roses falling from her hair into the limpid waters of the lagoon, while she looked after an unfaithful lover. The deserted girl found a strange,

reflected image in the moon, as a woman of mysterious charm poised in her boat, curved to a crescent outline, with the silvery light shed from her rippling garments down on the glancing waves.

The most finished of these designs represented a Venetian balcony, elaborate in detail, the rich and glowing loveliness of the occupant enhanced by the decorations of a parish *fiesta*.

Madame Sturm reverted to the picture of "The Stork Children."

"You are thinking of the wretched failure I have proved, madame, since the old man Elias Heins led me from the Rhine-bank," exclaimed Gerard with bitterness. "I hoped, in my rash youthful presumption, to become a Giorgione. What am I in my prime? A painter of women and children, with unusual cleverness, if you will, in the management of tones and draperies."

Rachel Van Limburg shook her head gently.

"You are unjust to your own merits," she rejoined. "I am wondering if your development would have been different had you remained beneath our cloudy Northern skies."

"Surely I should have been different," assented Gerard, with a sigh. "I was a stork child, and longed to try my wings."

"I find an element here lacking in the latter studies," added the lady.

"What element, I beg?" demanded the artist eagerly.

"Originality, freshness, perhaps power. However, to-day you have reached the goal. The future belongs to you."

"Yes," assented Gerard.

"I wish to own 'The Suicide,' my friend," she concluded, after a pause.

Gerard turned to her with emotion perceptible on his features, and kissed her hand.

"Consider the picture as already yours, madame," he replied. "I had not intended to part with it, otherwise. I was forced to paint it. I have put aside the sketch every year, as something painful, repugnant to myself; and the temptation always returns."

When Madame Sturm had gone, with many gracious expressions of interest, Gerard shut himself up in his studio, and remained plunged in meditation. He refused Bianca admission, or to accompany the family to Versailles.

The pretty woman shrugged her plump shoulders, and pouted a little. Why attempt to fathom the varying moods of the artistic temperament? The visit of the stranger lady from the North had left him in a bad humor.

Bianca assumed her most audacious and eccentric toilet, and adjusted the sashes and furbelows of her children with maternal complacency, and went forth, with all the holiday world, to gaze at the spouting spray of the great fountains.

Left alone, Gerard placed the picture of "The Stork Children" on an easel, and looked long at the once-familiar scene.

The presence of Rachel Van Limburg transported him to the misty skies and fleeting sunshine of the Low Countries. The whirr of the windmill hummed in his ears, mingled with the beating of the waves on the ocean-bound dykes.

What fate had befallen Elias Heins, most whimsical of benefactors? Gerard did not know. The old man might have fallen on the deserted highway, belated on some frosty night, and been swept away to the grave by the hand of public charity. Possibly he was roaming

on, defying time to check his powers. On several occasions Gerard had detected a fancied resemblance in some wayfarer of the crowd. He would have scarcely been surprised, had a tap on the studio-door announced the advent of the *savant*, to test the quality of the bread of charity once cast on the waters by his hand.

Gerard had communicated with the miller's wife, at the date of his marriage, and received a reply, curt in form, written by the miller, to the effect that the mother was dead, while the other children were well.

In the *atelier*, adorned with many works of merit, on the eve of success, the second stork child felt a sense of personal isolation as keen as that of Elias Heins when nightfall overtook the philosopher in wood or open country.

Gradually the thoughts of the artist turned into another channel. From the farm of the Rhine-bank to the house of the musician at Venice, was the completion of the chord of memory.

Even now when his eye fell on the sketch of Pippo yonder, crouching on the steps, with his cage of parrakeets on his knee, his lips muttered, —

“Accursed dwarf!”

Fever had succeeded the discovery of Bianca Bardi on the sands of Lido, and delirium declared full sway before the boat regained the town.

Wary Gesualda opened the portal to admit them, and spread a couch in the lower *sala*. Doctor, nurse, and even Daniele Falcioni, might come to look at Gerard, and minister to him; but no mention was made of that upper story, with its treasures, of which Gesualda kept the key in her pocket. Even the grief of the nurse for her lost Marina could not make her lose sight, for a moment, of her trust.

Gerard, during those hours of suffering, had seen only the dwarf Pippo, and his cage of green birds. Pippo dashed the cup of cooling drink from his parched lips, mocked at his helplessness, and triumphed over sorrow, perched on the foot of the bed, with quirk and grimace.

In the lapse of hours the artist took pencil and brush. Once more the façade of the old Gothic *palazzo* grew beneath his touch. Gate, basement, and *campo* were veiled in shadows of night; while above in the clear vault of

sky was visible the nightly miracle of stars, scintillating in illimitable distance, shooting athwart the zenith with the pale emerald glow of meteors, reflected in long, quivering arrows of silvery light in the sleeping waters of the canal.

Leonardo Bardi stood in his casement, playing on his violin; and the airy shapes of celestial harmonies, evoked by his bow, escaped on glittering ephemeral wings out into the night, drawn upward to the infinite space of the star-worlds, while mortals crept near to listen in the *campo* below.

Surely a voice spoke in the silence of the studio: —

“At last you have given to the house a soul.”

The years with their seasons recur in the Sea City. The grandfather has dropped like a withered leaf, and two old men resembling him ply their craft of hooking the gondolas to shore. Pippo, the dwarf, has abandoned his calling of telling fortunes with the aid of the parrakeets, and haunts the steps of churches to beg for a dole. He has lost his former

vivacity, and become dull, morose, half-idiotic. The neighbors affirm that some stroke of evil left him thus, received at the date of Marina Bardi's disappearance.

The house of the musician remains closed, with barred shutters and doors. The place has acquired the evil name of being haunted. Daniele Falcioni, with his debt paid, prudently withdrew from purchasing the property, had Gerard been disposed to sell it. The usurer was aware that even the mosaic-workers might hesitate to rent the rooms for workshops, and the humblest class of lodgers prefer to seek shelter elsewhere.

On the Vigil of All Souls the citizen, whose courage is adequate, may pause before the door of the Gothic palace, at midnight, when he will hear the note of a violin wailing through the deserted chambers, and the rich, passionate voice of a woman singing, succeeded by wild shrieks and outbursts of mad laughter. The spirits of Leonardo Bardi and of his daughter are said to then frequent the spot.

In the autumn, when the vintage was ripe, and the Brenta flooded the plains, Gerard

Grootz, accompanied by his son, reached Venice.

The boy Marino, convalescing from a dangerous illness, had been taken to the Engadine, and through the Tyrol.

"I am to visit the parish church where mamma and old Gesualda used to pray, and see the picture of St. George," said the little invalid.

Gerard directed the gondola to the familiar *campo*, moved by conflicting emotions.

Marino climbed the steps, and paused suddenly to gaze up at the Gothic palace.

"What a strange house!" he murmured.

Gerard made no response. In his own mind he experienced relief. The women had never described their former habitation to the children, then? Better so.

Marino approached the gates, and shook the iron-work with his feeble grasp. "Could we enter?" he questioned, half fearfully.

"No. The place is closed," was the decisive response.

A dwarf sat on the church step. Pippo did not recognize Gerard, who tossed him a coin in passing.

Marino prayed at the altar indicated by maternal affection, and inspected the altarpicture of San Giorgio, without comment. He could discern no resemblance between the slender stripling with flowing blonde hair, and the heavy maturity of his parent.

“Now we must return to the hotel,” said Gerard, emerging once more into the *campo*.

“No. There was something else,” retorted Marino.

“What, my child?”

“I am to see the usurer in his shop, all full of beautiful glass, ivory, and bronze, who was the dragon when you were very poor.”

“Ah!”

They sought the precincts of Daniele Falcioni. The collection of pictures, stuffs, furniture, and weapons, was still fine; but an assistant came forward to serve them. Daniele Falcioni and his family dwelt at Rome.

Marino again paused in the middle of the *campo*, to gaze at the *palazzo*.

“What a strange house!” he repeated, and continued to look at it over his shoulder, as he followed his father to the gondola.

Placing the child amidst the cushions, Ge-

rard swiftly returned. He removed his hat, he could have knelt save for the bright scrutiny of his son. The place was to him the tomb of many memories. A woman had hoped, aspired, suffered, and been wronged, within those prison-bars of circumstance, while her wedding portion awaited her in the secret recess. She had gone forth, and the sea depths had proved her marriage-bed, the waves her winding-sheet.

That evening father and son floated on the Grand Canal.

The gorgeous hues of sunset still lingered over tower and façade, tingeing the encircling waters a deep orange; while the twilight already shrouded the distant margin of buildings where Gerard had dwelt when he came here as a young pilgrim. Already palpable darkness seemed to project on the liquid gold of the waters towards their craft, in the middle distance, as if the shadow of the house of the musician had fallen across their track.

“Papa, if I were not a Frenchman I should like to be a Venetian,” said Marino, and his voice acquired an elfin tone in the twilight.

“ Truly ? ” queried Gerard, preparing to light a cigar.

“ Papa, I wish to be a musician ; ” the young voice grew still more weird and faint.

Gerard put aside the cigar without comment.

“ There is only one instrument in the world, and that is the violin,” said Marino.

Gerard was silent.

The boat floated on the waters, with the pure sky above. The past and the future blended thus, with the life-germ between.

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